

용사를 피해 튀어라

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Running Away From The Hero! **(Remake)**

– 용사를 피해 튀어라! –

- Volume 1 -

-Author-

Phantom Of The Moonlit Night

월야-팬텀

- STORY -

When I woke up after a pretty crappy death, what greeted me was one of those famous fantasy worlds! I didn't expect anything like becoming the strongest with a common job, or rising to the top with the weakest class...

All I wanted was to live a slow farming life, but the world just wouldn't leave me alone! And so I equally backstabbed good people and bad people alike, becoming a villain with a true sense of equality and just when I was about to retire and enjoy a proper life on a farm...

"Master!"

My former disciple at the evil organisation, currently the hero of justice came looking for me. Can't you all just leave me alone?

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Prologue

Humans.

Compared to other species, humans were extremely weak.

If one were to set this species as the standard, one would immediately realize that there weren't a lot of species that were weaker than humans.

After all, humans didn't have the strength akin to that of orcs, nor did they have the talent for magic that elves had, nor did they have a dwarf's crafting skills.

But strangely enough, the world revolved around humans. Disregarding the demon continent that was ruled by the demon race, around 70% of the world was ruled by humans.

Even when you take into account the fact that other races weren't greedy and only focused on living by themselves, one simply has to question why humans own so much land. Well, this line of thought would be normal for most, but this wasn't what I thought at all.

You see, I happen to think that humans were beings specifically made for battle.

Not many species ever get into conflict with each other frequently. The most infighting you'd see is in their imperial courts.

But humans are different. Why was strategy created in the first place? To fight species stronger than humans? To defend themselves against the "demon season", an event where the demon king revives? No, all wrong.

It was to fight humans.

The infighting within the imperial palaces around the world was a regular event that takes place every year. And every ten years, some two countries would enter a war against each other.

Unlike other species, who fight a hundred vs. hundred at most, humans fight with massive numbers. There are even times when an army of million would fight an army of similar numbers as well.

But this isn't the only reason why I'm saying that humans are the species born for battle.

"This is the end!"

"Kuooooo!"

A black dragon roared in pain in front of me.

Dragon.

The strongest specie that existed in this world. Even high demons hesitated fighting it, and even the demonkind that lived on the other continent trembled before its power.

It was a being that lived for thousands of years, and was even titled the master of magic. And currently, this master of magic was being brutally beat up.

By the hands of a human.

It wasn't as if the dragon was young, either. A thousand years. The time it takes for an empire to rise and fall. Only after this time would a dragon become an adult.

In human standards, a dragon less than a thousand years is pretty much like a preschool child who isn't worth talking about anything with.

Compared to that, the black dragon was an infamous high dragon. In other words, it was a dragon that lived for at least ten thousand years that got recognized for its power by other dragons.

Compared to that, the one who was beating up the dragon was a human. Young, too. Twenty five at best. Seeing how the cutoff for high dragons was an age of twenty thousand years, the dragon was getting floored by someone eight hundred times weaker than it.

Indeed, it is as you think, reader. Inside humans lay! A piece of DNA that allowed humans to fight beings like dragons and demon kings, just like the piece of DNA that allowed saiyans to turn into super saiyans! In other words, humans had the potential to become heroes!

“Sir hero...”

There even was a princess from a neighboring country faithfully fulfilling her role as the extra...

I, who too was spectating the battle between the dragon and the hero like the sobbing princess, felt liquid pour out not out of my eyes, but my back. As I felt the sweat collect, I prayed.

‘Fight hard, dragon!’

I was planning on running away after sticking the hero in some hospital of some sorts! Just why do you think I brought the hero all the way out here?!

“To think... to think I, Arketai, would die in the hands of a human!”

But unfortunately... the dragon ended up dying. And the hero, who achieved this enormous feat, took out the sword from the dead dragon and bowed towards me.

“It was as you said, teacher.”

“No, this was all done thanks to your efforts.”

“No, you’re wr- urgh?!”

“Sir hero!”

The hero’s words of denial was interrupted by the stereotypical hug from the princess. As I watched the hero become flustered, I felt more sweat run down my back than ever.

“Damn it...”

Mn? Why am I sweating so hard when the hero won, you ask? Why is it a problem that the hero is my disciple?

Well, you see, my dear reader, this is all very simple when you think about it.
It's because I'm a villain.

Chapter 1

I Didn't Know Then (1)

Normally, when you look into a fantasy light novel,

The main character would either get a special weapon, a special skill, or in some cases, the main character would even drag a goddess with him (doesn't seem all that useful, though).

Or in sometimes, the main character already happened to be learning magic, and would get transported into a world that had a very primitive form of magic. In some other cases, the main character would actually reincarnate as a monster like a slime or a goblin, and still manage to wreck shit.

But, my dear readers, this is all fiction! It ain't real!

It works quite a lot like fiction in kdramas. You don't meet rich-ass sons of bitches just by bumping shoulders with them on the street. We all know this is all just bull. No way these rich kids would be eating shit oden in a random food cart, or eat out at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant. Nope, that kind of stuff never happens in real life.

I don't know specifically what kind of steak they eat, and in which 5-star hotel they eat it at, but I know for sure that these people don't go around food carts eating cheap food. Ah well, I suppose the part of the dramas that's actually fictional is the main heroine being some sort of a legendary creature that was an orphaned beauty who went through all kinds of hardships in life. Well, whatever. Back to our talk about the bs in fantasy stories. Take a look at this load of bull. In a lot of light novels, main characters are able to understand the languages of the world they reincarnate in. Hell, even in our world, there are hundreds of different languages that get spoken in one continent. Why would the people in a different dimension of all things all universally speak Korean? Well, in reality, they don't. Because of this, I had to spend five years of my life learning how to speak. Normally in this world, kids would speak by the age of three, and learn how to write by the age of five.

I became able to write properly by the age of ten. My parents almost decided that I

was hopelessly stupid by that time. Thankfully, I managed to change their minds with my math skills.

But this was a world that recognized kids as a math whiz as long as they could add and subtract pretty well. People in my village almost thought I was a genius at math because I was able to multiply and divide. And as for the knowledge I had other than math... all useless. There were no computers, so my knowledge in computers were all gone to shit. I spent half of my life in a place called school, but in the end, the only thing that became useful was knowing how to add and subtract... Truly, the Korean education system was total trash. And once again, I was reminded that fiction, in the end, was fiction.

Yeah, modern knowledge. It's pretty useful. But so what? Knowing what a chair looks like, and knowing how to make a chair are two totally different things. The specialized tools to make a chair are nigh impossible to recreate in this world. If making just a chair is this hard, how much effort do you think goes into making a gun? Even if you know what guns look like, how would you create the parts of the guns? If you don't have the skills, all you have are dreams. Even if you know about something that already exists, it just ends up becoming a part of your imagination!

In the end, I decided to inherit my parent's farm. The knowledge I accumulated in school was useless, but the skills I accumulated in the military weren't! As expected of Korea's brutal military training! Korea's most advanced form of weaponry, the shovel, applied in just about any situation!

My skills in using the shovel almost made my father say "you truly were a child born to shovel!" Really, all my talents lay in farming!

...I used to have those moments in life.

When I was thirteen, my parents passed away.

The reason? An evil wizard's experiment!... that wasn't it.

The whims of a corrupt noble!... that wasn't it either.

The demons that wrecked havoc during the demon season!... Nope.

Their true cause of death was electrocution. An evil wizard blocked a magic spell from

the hero, and the remnants of it happened to bounce off to my parents.

Just like the innocent cars that randomly hit each other and explode in action movies during a car chase, my parents died while trying to pay taxes and sell their crops in the city.

To think I'd be this unlucky... I wondered for a bit how I should lead my life as the new family head, but in the end, I decided to farm. After all, the country still paid me some reparations for the damages, right? I still have land and crops to back me up!

...There was a time when I thought that, too.

“Hohoho.”

I could only laugh as I watched my crops burn. It's been a year since my parents died. It's been only a year, and our feudal lord just decided to give me a big fuck you... rather, he gave the country a big fuck you.

A gold mine was found on the borders between our nation and some other nation, and that place happened to be close to our fief.

Our lord, after getting several suggestions from his subordinates, decided to conquer the mines. He defeated the troops stationed there by a fief lord from a different country.

Right. So far, this seems to be all good. But the fief lord became overexcited by taking over the gold mines, and charged into the country across the border!

The fact of the matter was, that country across the border happened to be the empire, the strongest nation in the continent. Our fief lord, who had believed that his army had been blessed by the gods, got pathetically killed by the enemy. At the same time, the empire took this as a declaration of war, and attacked the nation the very next day. They managed to topple the capital in two months.

Ah, by the way, the sea of flames in front of me was caused by the empire, who decided to make an example out of those who acted out against the empire. They set fire to the lands of our fief, and my land happened to be in it. That's right. Farming just went to shit! Fall was still quite far away, but I couldn't farm using just ashes!

“Kuh!”

That’s why, that’s why the reason why I became a gangster was because of the world! I wanted peace, but the world didn’t let me have it!

Ah, and by the way, I’m not one of those loan sharks or anything. I just mug people.

I have no idea if this is really a good thing or not, but the nation I lived in ended up getting split into seven pieces. Originally, the empire took only a fourth of the nation, but the king ended up getting into a coma from shock, and the princes ended up fighting for the throne. A count even managed to join the battle for power at some point. In any case, at a time like this, a lot of people decided to either turn into bandits or thieves. I had pretty decent sword skills, so I decided to earn cash from that. I was thinking of going to the empire once I had enough cash.

I teamed up with one or two people, and sometimes collaborated with other groups I shared info with to raid some villages. Sometimes I got together with some old bandits and a noble to beat up some nobles as well.

Once I earned enough money like this, and began searching for a smuggler to get me into the empire, someone came to meet me.

“How is it?”

I was being scouted. Hoho, I remember working myself to the bone, close to the point where I actually died in the past. Even then, I wasn’t scouted because I had no talent at what I did. I do some bad things, and whazam, someone comes to get me in a red carpet. From the biggest evil organization in the empire at that.

“The pay is pretty good.”

“Incentives are nice as well.”

“Seems pretty dangerous.”

“Well, it’s similar to what you’re doing now.”

“Do I have to kill myself if they tell me to do so?”

“Yes. You just need to be careful, though.”

I need to really put my life on the line. But unlike my previous life in hellish Korea, the pay was actually good. Enough to make me want to risk my life.

“I’ll do it.”

Like this, I, a to-be fifteen year old, joined an evil organization.

With this, my age became forty. I spent twenty five years of my life dedicated to the organization.

I took a pretty safe job of an instructor. I currently have a job of a senior instructor, training young trainees in the way of evil. Ah, this is the life. No risk of dying, good pay, really good incentives to boot.

Evil organizations are the best, everybody!

“I’ll go with the format from before. I’ll take one through fifty, and nine hundred fifty to a thousand.”

The other instructors all shut their mouths when I said this.

“You’re taking the top ones as well?”

“That and the lowest ones... can’t you just take the children in the middle ranks?”

The other instructors voiced their dissent. But I had made my decision already.

“One through fifty, and nine hundred fifty to a thousand.”

There are a few people like me who gets scouted to the organization, but most of the members of the organization who get in begin as either orphans or slaves. We train these kids for about two years.

We feed them and beat them until they become fit enough to become proper members of the organization. That is our job as instructors.

Among all these thousand kids, the ones I like best are the first fifty, and the last fifty!

The kids at the very front are the cream of the crop. The worst among them are still good enough to pass as a middle-class member of the organization. Sometimes, you'll even find geniuses among them. The incentive for training them is low, though. That's why I fill that gap with the last fifty of the group to cancel out the disadvantages of training the geniuses. A lot of the kids from the last fifty are useless, but sometimes you end up getting one of them to the top, and the incentive you get from that is immense. As a result, my rank as an instructor goes up, and the number of zeros in the incentive I get increases by one!

That's why I always pick the first fifty and the last fifty. The ones who are tenacious among all these kids always survive anyway. And my method of education allows kids to always survive as long as they can endure. Other instructors manage to kill tens of kids every time they pick trainees, but I managed to become a model instructor with zero casualties under my belt. There's a reason why I'm a senior instructor!

"They say there are quite a lot of talented kids in this group, so... I expect about five would survive?"

"The quality of this group's pretty damn high, so I'm thinking about ten."

"The last group was said to be the best in the history of the organization, and only seven survived."

"Well, Naruan's training is quite infamous for being brutal, after all."

"But the kids in this group probably have their pride, don't you think? If everyone other than five or seven gets knocked out again, they'd be completely useless. I'm betting on their tenaciousness. Thirty thousand gold on having ten survive."

"Hoho, going strong, aren't you? Forty thousand on five."

"Twenty thousand on seven."

"Thirty thousand on five as well."

"I'll try... thirty thousand on complete annihilation."

But it seemed that the other instructors didn't really have the mindset of a model

instructor like me. Just look, to think they'd be betting on how many of the kids I pick would survive...

"How many do you think would survive, senior instructor?"

One of the instructors asked the question towards me. How many would survive?

"As long as they're tenacious, they'll survive."

"...Tenacious, is it."

I don't push people until they die. The ones that don't last are the strange ones. Right. I'm not the strange one here, the ones who don't survive are strange!

"Yes. As long as one is tenacious, one will get strong."

That's right. After all, I, a person without mana, survived this long in a world of magic where elves and orcs thrive. Seriously, if you don't manage to survive even when you have mana, you're just strange.

I've lived thirty years in my past life, and lived forty in this life. I've managed to survive seventy years just by working my ass off.

#1 Their Story: A Certain Trainee

This is crazy. Absolutely crazy. Maddening, almost.

"Hohoho, they did mention that you were one of the best groups in history. I suppose they were right, seeing how well you kids are doing."

Magic was raining down from the skies. Only five days after the start of the higher class training, 30 people survived.

On the midnight of the first day, the sudden magic bombing on our sleeping quarters knocked out half of the group. The length of time we've survived for during this five days was still quite long, I've heard, but even then, we were reaching the limit.

"Hmm, I have high expectations for this batch."

I could see instructor Naruan, who was talking to the communication wizard to direct the bombings every once in a while with an emotionless face.

I had heard that he was the one who shaped most of the powerhouses in the current organization by himself. I had heard that I might get the chance to become one of those people.

But whenever I heard those words, the other instructors all smirked and said this: [Even so, it's usually about one in twenty who make it to the top. Sometimes, it's one out of fifty.] Most of them come back next year to be trained again.

When I heard those words, I thought that I'd become one of those succeeding people.

I had cast away my war-torn village to step into the path of darkness.

My resolve was different from the kids who had come here because they had no choice.

In fact, this resolve of mine allowed me to rank twenty-seven out of a thousand other children.

But still... Isn't this really too much?

I went to sleep, excited about what I was to learn the very next day. And the moment I closed my eyes, a siren went off and our living quarters were destroyed within a minute. I come out confused and lost, and I'm told that if I don't make it to a specific location within a set time, I'm out.

The thing I've heard when I arrived at that location was perhaps the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard.

"Ooh. I've heard forty nine had survived the first attack, but to think forty nine would be here as well... As an instructor, I am exceedingly happy! I am so, so, soooo happy, in fact, it feels like I might as well be crying tears of joy right now!"

His delighted voice didn't fit his cold expression at all. His chilly eyes and trembling lips almost suggested that he was restraining his laughter.

"Ahh, it is said that the teachings of a teacher is akin to the heavens itself, but to think

you'd make me cry... The gods above must be crying in joy with me as well."

Naruan looked up as if he was waiting for something, then looked down at us again.

"Right. It seems that the tears of the heavens would be falling upon us soon, so prepare your umbrellas."

The first thing I had in my mind was: was he crazy?

There were not a single clouds in the sky. There didn't seem to be any sign of rain. Plus, the "umbrella" that was provided for us was more like a wooden branch. It was incapable of blocking a single drop of water.

"...Hold on, this is?"

The one who rid me of my confusion was a high-pitched voice. When I turned around, I could see a girl ranked ten ranks higher than me, trainee number seventeen.

"Oho. So there's already someone who can recognize the umbrella. This'll be simple, then."

Snap.

The moment Naruan snapped his fingers, someone appeared next to him.

"Make it rain."

At the same time, silver rain began to fall upon us.

Chapter 2

I Didn't Know Then (2)

Ahhh, it's as nervewracking as ever. When a new semester starts, did my old principal feel like this when he made the same speech he always did?

But to think he could say such boring words despite that, as I thought, the job of principal something just anyone can do.

You'd probably need at least a mithril-grade thick face to be a principal.

Although all I did was walk up to the pedestal a hundred pairs of eyes all come to focus on me.

There are some excited ones, nervous ones, and completely emotionless ones.

Well, not that it matters.

Grow like weeds and become my incentive! Is just about all I feel from that.

"Now my fresh hatchlings with eggshell still stuck on your feathers, welcome. I am the one in charge of Squad 1, Instructor Naruan."

I could see some of them looking discontent at being called hatchlings.

Those're probably the ones who had their heads high from their pretty high prelim ranks.

But it's rare that top in primary school ends up being top in high school.

Of course, it's not like the skills from having your nose buried in your desk since primary school would have gone anywhere. That's not how talent works.

Starting suddenly and overturning the standards of normality.

That is the realm of genius. It doesn't seem like there are any geniuses among this lot, but there will definitely be someone who will rise to their talents and overturn the previous order.

"Other instructors start training from today, but Just. For. Today. I'll be giving you kids the day off. If I talk any more my mouth will hurt and you'll only get pissed. Go to your assigned dorms and for today, enjoy your day off."

After a moment of silence, the kids walked away happily as I watched over them and gently smirked.

As expected of an evil organization.

They didn't even give those kids a proper break. But I'm different! I let them rest the moment they came!

Where else are you going to find an instructor like me!

".....Is this the infamous last supper?"

But even while looking at my kindly smile, the organization's personnel who had come to help with tomorrow's training all for some reason or another, had their faces turning pale.

What was it? Was there something wrong with lunch?

"It's not their last. I haven't had anyone die on me in my training course yet."

"That's true. They won't die."

Although her words left a sour taste in my mouth I'm not going to ask any further.

Normally in an evil organization there's no real sense of camaraderie between colleagues.

Evil organizations that pointlessly insist on that tend to have all their members drawn in like sausages if so much as one of them get caught, so long-running evil organizations always live with the determination to abandon each other at any moment.

Because of that even when you need the cooperation with other branches, any of them could equally be enemies looking for an opportunity to stick their knives in your backs, and to prevent that you need to be pretty social even in an evil organization.

And in front of my eyes is one of the great peaks of the 'must be friends' list!

The famous magician brigade!

The moment you get on the bad side of either the mage corps that can blast away the enemy with accurate and heavy firepower, or any of the Treasury staff that guarantee your salary and operating overheads you might as well half kiss your organization life goodbye already.

When you desperately raised your budget but the Treasury worker that you were on bad terms with slashed your budget by half, or when the mage corps that promised to help out say they couldn't come because they were busy, of course it would have a massive impact on your job!

"Let's get ready, shall we."

"Understood."

Even so, according to the organization's official hierarchy I'm quite high up.

As the magician nodded in response to my words and vanished, I checked the time.

"Current time 1400 hours."

There's ten hours left till the day ends. I definitely said that you kids could rest **Just. For. Today.** you know?

#2. Their story: A certain mage's story.

"Boss, is this really training for kids?"

As a mage of Howling, a place far removed from justice and light, and far closer to darkness and evil, I've done plenty of things that shouldn't have been done.

If I was assigned a target then I would spare no means or effort to do the job, and if

needed I'd even casually annihilated a village or two.

With scores of experience in killing yesterday's ally turned traitor, but this was weird, even for myself who had done all those things.

"If it's the Empire-style carpet bombing, then not even the organization's special forces can block that."

The very first day of the timetable and it's already absolutely insane.

The tactic that the Mad Witch of the Empire had devised during the last great war.

The theory behind it was simple.

A mage would head up to 5000m above sea level and create ice by freezing water vapour with ice magic, then drop it, simple, but the results were anything but.

A thirty thousand strong force of the Merdeia kingdom which was at odds with the Empire was annihilated with this simple tactic and five thousand of them died.

The magic barrier of the mages and archmages were torn to shreds by the simple concepts of mass and velocity, and even before Merdeia's soldiers could send out their mages to hunt ours, the troops led by the Mad Witch attacked the capital in chaos.

The battle where just ten thousand of that Mad Witch's forces more or less massacred thirty thousand of the military kingdom Merdeia's forces is already scheduled to be immortalised in the empire's history books.

But that, is going to be fired on these kids who've barely passed their preliminary training.

"You'll have to control it well."

"Boss! Even a pebble will break skulls if they're dropped from 5000m above sea level."

"Indeed. So the kids will need have the mindset that they need to dodge well."

"If they can't dodge they'll die!"

Even if the turnover rate is only slightly lower than the empire's in during their slaughter happy times, I can't see this wastage of human resources like this.

My conscience hadn't run so dry to send these innocent kids to a dog's death.

But even in the face of my pleas the boss's answer was unchanging.

"They're not going to die."

No. To be precise, they're making dead eyes.

"...Is it an order from the top?"

"It is, and one from Instructor Naruan's direct disciples."

Instructor Naruan's direct disciple.

The empire, no, the continent's evil organisations training facilities each had their own specific quirks, but what they all had in common was that each batch would have a hundred people in them.

Of course, not all of the hundred were trained perfectly.

Some places fifty, some places seventy, some places thirty.

Depending on the training there were a lot of trainees that died, and there were also some training schools where more died than graduated.

But even in amongst all those, Instructor Naruan's trainees were regarded as incomparable.

The reason being, very simply, that each time, no more than a single digit number of trainees ever completed the full course.

Organization or no, an instructor like that should be fired, but there was a reason why he could still hold his position as an instructor. That was because all the trainees who survived his training took the top positions of the organization with overwhelming strength and speed.

Especially the class just before the one regarded as the greatest ever, currently all the disciples from that squad broke record after record and all of them took vital roles in the organization's military, diplomacy, internal affairs, treasury and so on.

And even so, each and every of them were so talented that blew away all their subordinates' doubts.

"This is what the Intelligence Vice-Director says. They will feel like dying, but they won't die. They won't die, but they'll at least be able to tour heaven. While being a tourist in heaven is possible, where you will end up is hell."

"Is it just me that I'm even more worried after hearing that?"

"Even if we say anything the higher-ups won't listen. Since it went without a hitch last year, all we can do is just do as we're told."

Looking at my boss's sighing back, I sighed as well.

He was still one of the organization's greats as the boss of the battlemages, but even so, he was just a salaried villain.

"The start time is 0000 hours. The codeword is 'make it rain.' we just have to be ready to fire tomorrow at 0100 hours."

"We can only hope and pray they don't die."

It leaves a bitter taste but what can we do.

If we were ones to argue about those things then we should be working for the empire, not an evil organization.

"Please... We can only hope that no one dies."

"Is that really the case... There are times when death can be a more peaceful rest."

Looking at the boss's oddly bitter smile, all I could do was pray for the trainees who would fall into despair in a few short hours.

Chapter 3

I Didn't Know Then (3)

Silver rain falling from the sky.

The moonlight flickered off the small fragments as they fell down where everyone was, the sight of objects being crushed under their fall was truly spectacular.

"Th, the rock just broke to bits!"

"Help me!"

Total chaos.

Traditionally, for any member of an evil organization, silence is life.

That's exactly why these chicks won't cut it.

Even if a dragons is snoozing right in front of your eyes you should be thinking about silencing your breath and fleeing.

The ones who panic this noisily are the Villain 1, Villain 2 set menus you so commonly see getting slaughtered by a charging hero.

"If you move you die!"

Ohh. Looks like there are still ones that stand out even in this chaos.

The first one who correctly identified the 'umbrella' and the one who's just staring up the sky at the silver rain like someone watching a meteor shower.

The former is one that knows about magic, while the latter is either a lunatic or just simply that insanely skilled.

Either way is fine. Those ones survive quite well.

Especially the latter. Whether they're insane or insanely skilled the fact that they can afford to act like that in this situation means that it's worth expecting things from them.

Up till now there've been a few of that type. If nothing else they're fiendishly good at staying alive, you know?"

"Umbrella, use the umbrella!"

The kid who first recognised the magic held up the umbrella I gave them and shouted.

"You crazy bitch how the hell is that an umbrella!"

A dumb one picks a fight in the middle of it. If you don't have the eyes to see you need to be able to trust people.

No, if someone without the eyes to see blindly trusts people doesn't that make them a pushover?

"A crazy bitch is better than a retard. You who's got pure water instead of brain fluid in that sparkling clean cranium of yours. Listen up. If this is rain, then humanity, no, life as we know it's completely screwed during the rainy season. Like that other guy said, this is the Empire-style bombardment developed during the last great war. And this is very much an umbrella, a protective staff with engraved with magic defense spells."

That was it. When it rains, one opens up their umbrella. It's a special staff made specifically to block that silver rain of death.

To be honest, it's simply because they didn't think of it, but that magic bombardment isn't something just anyone can use.

Naturally once the Empire used it, all the horrified world powers immediately copied it, and same for the Merdeia kingdom that was completely totaled by the bombardment.

Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, everyone started using this strat, and on the contrary, the majority of the mage divisions were annihilated.

What's there to hide! My favorite phrase is 'to be cut in the foot by a trusted axe.'

And responding to that faith, what my previous workplace's bosses and I came up with was this defensive strategy!

With the thoughts that this magic bombardment strategy would almost certainly be used by the enemy sooner or later, we just simply thought our hardest for ways to give our enemies the giant middle finger, the result of which is that defensive magic staff.

+1 point to the kid who identified it first. For the record, at 10 points you get to graduate early.

"But only the Empire's soldiers know how to use it!"

"If we don't know how to use this, we're dead. Find how."

This batch seems quite usable? It's not like there were ones who didn't recognise what that staff was in the previous cohort, but there were idiots who just ran off with the staff after hearing those words, I nearly recorded my first casualty in my entire time as an instructor.

My previous boss and I weren't morons so taking into account the possibilities that they could be stolen on the battlefield, leaked by spies in our allies or troops, or like me, who stole the finished product and secretly sold it off to the enemy nation for a massive price, with that in mind we made it so that you couldn't block the bombardment with the staff alone.

To begin with, the bombardment method is carried out by a two mage per team group, not using ice magic, but directly freezing the moisture in the stratosphere and dropping it, so even if they block ice magic with magic barriers, it's a simple chunk of ice with nothing but mass and a very high velocity so the magic barrier goes splat, and as a bonus people also go splat!

As a result, the method of activating that staff is different to activating all other conventional staves. And it's a Class 1 imperial classified information.

But so the saying goes. Catch not fish for a man, but teach a man how to fish.

So let's not catch fish for them and teach them how to go about catching fish instead.

“Let’s narrow it in a bit.”

“Narrowing in.”

Don’t they say people perform the most spectacular feats right when they’re on death’s door?

Seeing as how these kids still can’t find a solution, I decided to kindly give them a solution instead.

The solution being that if they couldn’t find a solution they would die.

“It’s getting closer!”

“Those of you at the edges, run to the center!”

“Damn it! They’re seriously gonna kill all of us!”

Sounds of the truly desperate. When humans are on the verge of death, their abilities skyrocket.

Right now their brains are turning over very very quickly. So let’s oil their brains a bit to help them turn over even quicker.

“Mix in a few big ones.”

“...Are you serious about not killing them?”

“It’s for show anyway. Fire them quite far off.”

At my words, the communication mage hesitated a bit before contacting the mages in the air, and shortly afterwards human-size blocks of ice started to form pits as they fell.

Thud!

The grand finale right over there.

As a block that seemed roughly 50 metres in diameter left a crater in the ground an odd quietness fell down on the trainees.

“Ah, fuck. That’s straight up unblockable.”

Everyone was silent. As the kid that was the most proficient in magic that had been

coolly leading charge swore, the ones that had only barely calmed down started panicking.

“Aahhh, looking good.”

“This is?!”

It was a comment to myself, but it seems to have been overheard.

It’s probably just me in thinking that the communication mage that was standing beside me took a step back while looking at me as if I was a devil or something.

Right?

“Isn’t it? A helpless crisis. A crisis that won’t ever be resolved no matter how much fight with despair and frustration. Normally the beings called heroes are ones who actively overcome those.

In any event, the beings called dragons are creatures you face while staking the survival of a small country on. But in old hero tales dragons and demon kings are defeated as a necessary ingredient.

“This is not a place where we train heroes.”

“Indeed. It is not. The complete opposite. However. When those beings called braves or heroes appear, every time our organization has suffered tremendous losses.”

Even if we look like this we’re still the Empire’s largest evil organisation.

Even though we cull off hundreds of brats that proclaim themselves a hero every year, but the number of times we get seriously unlucky and get fucked over by a genuine hero is at least a two-digit number every year.

“And because of this we need heroes of the villains.”

Looking at the sector in turmoil, I smiled slightly.

Ahh. Grow. Grow big and strong my incentives!

But back then I didn’t realise. That the creature called a genuine hero would actually be born from this place.

#3 Their Story: The Future Hero's Story

Raina Rel Swin.

Even if I look like this I'm from Raina ducal family, one of the military pillars in the Karuan Empire, the strongest empire in the continent.

The strongest nation in the continent, and among those one of the greatest nobles which had imperial blood running through its veins.

It sounds good when you hear about it.

But because of that I'm 37th in line to the throne.

Being in the line to the throne is great. It's a chance to be the greatest power, the Emperor himself!

But that, you need to be ranked high for it to be worth anything. 37th isn't even worth ranking. Rather, a perfect condition to get myself killed off quietly in a ditch somewhere.

Plus, the succession problem is already half – no, pretty much completely over.

Two princes and a princess were in a three-way war, but one day the princess pushed all her backing onto one of the princes.

Even now, it's said that if the princess had been a boy, this entire succession fight would never have happened.

The other two princes had been half-cooperatively wary of her, but since all her might went behind a single person, game over.

Because of this, my brothers quickly gave up their plans for the throne and aimed for the duke's position instead.

That's right. It's good. Succession rights. To a dukedom!

The next best seat after an emperor! A man must have big dreams!

But you know, I don't really give a crap. I just wanted to eat and have fun in the territory!

But to keep that me in check, while spouting the biggest damn bullshit such as 'for the empire!' or 'for His Imperial Majesty!' they gave me a secret mission as a duke's son.

You call it a secret mission. Oi. To infiltrate the evil organization Howling, that's pretty much been around since the start of the empire.

You all fucking mad? If you're that devoted to empire and emperor then you go!

But due to my upbringing as a military family, actually no, a clan that existed purely to fight from birth, under my training as a Raina child I recorded great results in my days in the lower barracks. I received the highest designation of 1, and entered hell.

"Now my fresh hatchlings with eggshell still stuck on your feathers, welcome. I am the one in charge of Squad 1, Instructor Naruan."

The man speaking to us from the pedestal was Instructor Naruan, a name which we heard of even the lower barracks and was frequently came up from the instructors as well.

Apparently, a man cursed by the gods. Because of that, he couldn't feel mana, nor could he use it.

Apparently, a man with the mark of the devil. Because of that, the moment the devil's magic weapon in his hands sound out, even gods can only grovel under his feet.

Apparently, the greatest career pathway course in the entire organization. As long as you can simply safely survive the training course, vice-captain was a given, you could even become one of the ten people at the absolute top of the organisation, the greatest course to success.

Apparently, the organization's greatest recycler. That trash would be separated out from humans at his hand.

But my first impressions of him were simple.

‘That’s not a man. That’s a devil!’

The instructor looked down at us with a cold expression.

But I saw. The faint, but definite smile of a child whose parents just bought them a new toy!

“Other instructors start training from today, but Just. For. Today. I’ll be giving you kids the day off. If I talk any more my mouth will hurt and you’ll only get pissed. Go to your assigned dorms and for today, enjoy your day off.”

From around me I can hear the sounds of idiots being happy.

Ahh, you morons! Did none of you get it? His meaning when he said he would rest us ‘just for today!’

And training really did begin the moment today turned tomorrow.

– W000000000ooooooooW0000000000oooooooo~

– Rise and shine, soldiers!

“Shit.”

They said that there would be an early start. They said it would be hard from the word go.

So they said rest up and grow fast.

So the majority slept at around 2200 hours. Even the ones later to bed slept at around 2300 hours.

But compared to them who were sleeping peacefully, filled with an anxious unease I didn’t sleep but prepared.

Dawn at the earliest.

But rising at midnight on the dot!

And add to that I could even see the precursors to bombardment magic outside the window!

“What the hell!”

“Wake up you nutcases!”

Four to a room. I kicked aside the ones who were still sleeping and jumped out the window.

I chose the first floor which was comparatively safer to escape from than a higher floor, the results were successful.

And what I could see in the sky were countless magic formations.

The sight really was impressive, but thinking how the its target were the rooms that I had been in just now sent shivers down my spine.

“Oh ho. That’s one up and ready.”

And looking at the lodgings being half-turned to dust as if he was amused by the sight, was Instructor Naruan as he turned to me.

O gods! What crimes did I commit in my past life, to let alone be sent to an evil organization, but to be fated to be sent off to this devil of an instructor?!

Shortly after I was lost in my frustration and despair, I heard Instructor Naruan’s satisfied voice.

“49 people successfully awake.”

What kind of training has half its cohort drop out when it hasn’t even started!

“It seems that the primary training was quite tough for you. I am not an evil instructor. For your peers that needed sleep, I will give them plenty of time to get it.”

The 51 that couldn’t wake up is probably headed for an eternal sleep. From what I heard, they’re being sent back for primary training again.

The ones whose skills are okay will probably go back for higher training, but the rest

of them will probably made into high-quality meat shields?

“Now then, the first training.”

The instructor tossed me a sheet of parchment as I was standing in front.

“Hm current time 00:34. Hmm... Alright, leisurely make your way over to the place marked on the map by 0300 hours.

Listening to his words, I stared blankly at the place marked on the map.

If my orientation skills I learned in primary training weren't different to here, the place marked on the map is at least a two hour run at full sprint.

The 'leisure' time the instructor spoke of was barely 20 minutes. And also, it takes OVER two hours at a dead sprint.

If people run at their highest effort then they need to rest, and walk slowly. Namely, an impossible condition.

“Oh, if you feel like you can't make it to the destination then feel free to give up. You can just come back and sleep together with the rest of your peers.”

He said as if to reassure us, but looking at Instructor Naruan's quaint smile, I, no, everyone standing here thought the exact same thing.

– If you fall behind you die.

And I saw the limits of humanity.

TOTAL SURVIVAL.

It was a moment where we could see just how much fear could drive us onwards, just what humans were capable of.

But hell hadn't even begun yet.

“Ooh. I've heard forty nine had survived the first attack, but to think forty nine would be here as well... As an instructor, I am exceedingly happy! Really, I am so proud of you

who were called the most promising cohort in recent history! I am so, so, soooo happy, in fact, it feels like I might as well be crying tears of joy right now.”

Frivolous words. But his face was as cold and expressionless as ever. That made it even more frightening.

“Ahh, it is said that the teachings of a teacher is akin to the heavens itself, but to think you’d make me cry... The gods above must be crying in joy with me as well.”

His eyes turned slightly to the skies as his words carried a hint of mania to them as well.

Because he did, my own eyes naturally turned upwards as well.

Clear sky. Sparkling stars. Weather which seemed like it would never, ever rain with this cloudless sky. Because of that, I shivered. I’d heard of it before.

The imperial soldiers, and in particular, the units under direct imperial control used the word ‘rain’ in their slang.

“Right, the tears of the heavens. It seems like the ground will get wet from the tears that turn into rain, and it would be a problem if my dear disciples caught a cold from the rain. So use your umbrella.”

“Wait, this?”

The staff that someone tossed to us at the instructor’s words. And another trainee let out a horrified shout.

What the fuck!

I was screaming internally yet it felt as if the words were caught in my throat.

That was the special magic bombardment defense tool that was developed by the imperial forces. Why was a Class 2 defense tool which was strictly monitored by the imperial family themselves doing here of all places!

“Oho. So there’s already someone who can recognize the umbrella. This’ll be simple, then.”

Grand magic defense staff. The special forces off the empire call it an ‘umbrella.’ in that case, the rain that we had heard of all this time could mean only one thing.

“Make it rain.”

And with those words, silver rain blanketed the sky.

Chapter 4

I Didn't Know Then (4)

As the circle of bombardment gradually closed in, everyone started gathering in the middle.

If this was a real war I'd let loose a big one bam! in the middle right there, but since this is kids' training I'll keep it suitably at the level where they can see the ground gouged out right in front of their eyes and leave it there.

Where else will you find such a kind instructor!

Back in my day a trainee or two was a month was a given, and on a real crappy day ten of them went to the next world once. That was pretty dangerous.

We went to beat up some goblins under the name of practical training but an orc came out. But really, the others were way too much.

I was 19 then, in my past life you could've gotten your resident ID card around about that age, so at the very least they should've been able to take an orc or two without breaking a sweat.

No matter whether you're specialised to fight humans or not, to think they'd be surprised and routed by what are essentially just humanified pigs.

Because of that I thought I was gonna die as I worked my ass off killing ten on my own.

Compared to that, my course, where you won't die and are given challenging opportunities, I as an instructor am a generous instructor. But as you'd think, the kids aren't seeing that way.

"We're all gonna die!"

"This devil of an instructor!"

"I'll curse you if I die!"

To think they'd be so rude when I was out of sight... That one's number 960, that's no. 72, oh ho, it looks like 25 and 40 cursed me as well. Minus marks, minus marks.

Initial impression failure. If they pass this let's take them around where the real devil lives.

Well, even if they don't survive, when they eventually get sent back to the primary training centers, I can just put in some words and have them sent to the Kanaria facility which has the highest mortality rate.

But time kept on passing, and although some of the group seemed like they were teetering between life and death, there was still no response.

"Around about now should be a good time for a couple of them to start passing..."

It would be troublesome if all of them failed.

Since the final evaluation report consisted of the other instructor's trained kids vs my trained kids, I just need at least one of them to survive.

To put it bluntly, if other instructors send out 100 then I just need to send one man to match a hundred.

Having said that, if no one passes, then evaluation becomes impossible. Rip my incentive and my salary drops.

My evaluation report could have a line like [No results achieved due to impossible overwork.] written on it.

In that case, after retiring from my instructor duties, I could be running around on the front lines or sent to some dangerous place where my head could be sent flying at any moment like my last workplace.

The wages are only worth going for when you're young and can earn it, now I want to just earn a little less and work in the back.

"Should we reduce the output?"

The communication mage carefully asked me.

Even if they look like this, the people that use can magic in the evil organisation are all highly valuable resources.

The mages that can operate in both the front and back lines are always in shortage no matter where in the world you go.

I specifically asked my ex-disciple to be lent them for a week, but this too will show up on their assignment history later on, and if they achieve a record of 0% success rate in their first instructor outing then it'll be hard for them to find rear-line support work as well.

But.

“The ones who can dodge, will.”

It's pointless. The sight of the rocks in the ground breaking, the earth forming craters right in front of them will all have made them imagine those things as their heads at least once already.

The ones who are already scared won't cross with the umbrella just because it's raining a little lighter.

“If just one of them passes, the rest will follow suit.”

Every now and then you can see at traffic lights where if one person goes jaywalking, other people automatically follow them thinking the lights have changed.

Once I saw the ridiculous sight where when one person went, the entire crowd crossed on a red light en masse.

Well, that's a slightly different story to this, but when you're going to die either way, when one person passes then others thinking 'maybe me too?' will definitely come crawling out of the woodwork.

The problem being that you need that one person.

And that one person appeared.

“What the hell?”

A crazy bitch even to my eyes.

#4 Their story: Mirua's story.

Mirua. My name and the last thing I have left from the people called my parents.

Since I was born, my country had been involved in a war. A really big war called the Great War.

Even now I don't understand what it means.

All I knew that people dying was daily life, and the only really big problem was that there was not enough to eat.

Because of that, I was alone since I was six.

When I was three with really faded memories, the person called my Dad was already non-existent, and the day I turned six, Mom went to the military camp for something to eat, but was swept up in an enemy ambush and didn't come back.

Well, thinking on it now, there was the possibility that she could have run away, but that's what I want to believe.

So Mom vanished, and after that I moved around here and there to scavenge for food.

Public order was in crisis. Because there was no one selling any goods, there was nothing you could steal, and in the nearby mountains where every green leaves were hard to find, the animals went extinct and you could hardly see so much as a blade of grass.

Thanks to this I fought battles with cats for trashcans, hung around the army camps for stale food and lived life that way.

Ah. Once when I slept by the walls of the army camp, there was a night assault by the enemy and even looking back on it now I still don't know how I survived that.

And so wandering around here and there looking for things to eat, one day I met an angel.

“I will give you food. Will you come with me?”

“Yes!”

Mom used to worry that I didn’t show much emotion, but I was so excited I surprised myself.

I followed the angel in black for maybe a few days?

I reached heaven.

“Fwaa...”

And for the first time in my life, I could eat the food called meat.

Up till now I thought the brown fragments in the army gruel was meat and I stuffed it in my mouth fearing someone would steal it.

Ahh, looking at its beautiful succulent light, I had to take a moment to reflect on my ignorance. But reflections are reflections.

Put in in my mouth first. It melted on my tongue.

“I can die happy now...”

I went to the place where a lot of people like wearing black clothes, and I got a set of the black clothes they wore.

I got the name No. 875, held a sword like they told me to, and learned how to swing a sword.

Stab the dummy, slice the dummy, eat. Stab and slice the dummy again, eat again.

I didn’t like the long-distance running they made us do because it made me hungry quicker, but since they fed us again it was alright.

The instructor said I had no talent. They said my skills weren’t improving, but since

they fed us I didn't really care.

Later on I was called No. 1000, and when I heard that we had to leave this place I was sad thinking that we couldn't eat this place's food anymore, but the food at the place where we arrived was even tastier so it didn't matter.

"It's beautiful."

Although I didn't really like it very much when they woke us up to sirens and bombardment like when I used to sleep by the army base, but right now didn't seem so bad.

Clear night sky.

The ice fragments that shined silver in the moonlight like shooting stars.

Why didn't I notice this beautiful sight earlier?

It was something I saw often when the base was invaded, but back then all I felt was the fear that I wouldn't be able to eat breakfast tomorrow.

When I just looked at it peacefully, it was a really beautiful sight.

"We're all gonna die!"

"This devil of an instructor!"

"I'll curse you if I die!"

The yells and curses from my surroundings are familiar. But the target is weird.

To think they'd curse the instructor who gave us really tasty food and showed us this wonderful sight.

Compared to the primary instructors who only made us yell and cut and stab and run and make us hungry, isn't he a good instructor?

"Ah..."

While I was staring at our instructor who was the target for all these unwarranted curses, a big mushroom came into my field of vision.

I don't know its name, but it's a tasty mushroom. I first tasted it when I was roaming around during the war, but when I did it was so delicious I nearly fainted.

Oddly enough, all the other plants around it had been taken to be eaten, but that mushroom alone was left alone.

Even when I was in the primary training barracks, when we had drills up in the mountains, I picked a few of them and roasted them secretly.

It was around then where I made an effort for the first time and learned fire magic.

'Is it okay to take it?'

For some reason everyone else was huddling together, but they did that often in the primary barracks as well.

They huddled around the strong or popular kids. I think they're doing that now as well.

Since I did my business alone anyway, it wouldn't really matter if I went there and back by myself.

It feels good to think I'll be able to eat that mushroom again for the first time in a while.

My footsteps lighten. The silver ice fragments are falling beside me, but they couldn't stop by happy feet.

I'm gonna die if I get hit by that. Instinct told me that it was dangerous.

No, even if it wasn't instinct, I saw people being hit by that and turned into red paste really often.

And so I'm used to it.

I can go thinking 'I can just move that way.' Nothing weird about that.

And as I moved forward with my light footsteps, the ice fragments started falling behind me as well.

“There’s a lot of them!”

My mood brightened a bit. No, it brightened a little lot so I got excited.

If there’s this much, I can eat my fill tonight and still have some left over for tomorrow.

Ahhh, today is a really happy day.



Past life, current life, combined 70 years.

During that time, in the school, army, workplace combined I have seen many a lunatic, and since arriving at the organisation I have encountered many more with multiple screws loose and I thought I’d seen them all.

But now I realised how little I actually knew. Even if this wasn’t designed to kill, it’s still a magic bombardment.

In the last Great War, this was the technique that made all the kingdoms realise just who was in charge.

Wait, to begin with this wasn’t meant as a skill for massacre, get hit and you’re screwed.

And that kid is dodging it. So naturally, as if he’s dancing.

If dodging this was possible, all the countries’ strategists and elite families’ specialists wouldn’t be clutching their heads to find a solution.

But I can understand that much. But what he was doing, walking through that insane barrage with beautiful dance-like steps was picking mushrooms.

Not caring one bit about the others looking stupidly at him, he was happily humming away as he pulled out his dagger and diligently harvested mushrooms into his pockets.

Wait, aren’t those shock shrooms?

They do have an official name, but the mushrooms that are usually called Shock Shrooms, are poisonous mushrooms that when eaten, your body would tingle like you've been electrocuted, followed by paralysis with a high chance of death by cardiac arrest.

It was a poisonous mushroom that even four year olds knew about, but he's collecting them while smiling?

Is he trying to kill by slipping them into my food? Let's avoid food with mushrooms for the next few weeks.

Rumours say that it tastes like you can see heaven, but since the possibility of getting a one-way ticket to heaven is higher, there are no morons that would actually eat it.

Let's sneak a peek at his files.

Huh, No. 1000.

The one deemed least talented out of all the trainees.

The majority of the detailed reports said no talent with the sword, lazy, vacant stares into space and so on.

There aren't any good appraisals. Then let me add a line.

-Crazy b*tch. Handle with caution.

Looking back, this appraisal is similar to the only girl of the crew from last year.

Although she's a genius that worked her way to the position of deputy director of the Intelligence corps, she was a crazy b*tch even looking objectively.

The way she looked at me in particular resembled a viper waiting for prey to the extent that I had to live as if waiting to be ambushed at any moment.

There actually were two cases where she invaded my bedroom.

"Can you bring that child over?"

"Yes, sir."

Note the current danger level as 'high.'

But since nothing's for sure, I thought that I should see him from up close before making a decision, but the exact moment I tell the communications magician beside me, No. 1000 turns to me instantly.

Magic is awesome! Who needs cellphones! But I can't use it!

Suppressing my tiny bit of despair and envy, I face the person in front of me.

She's small. Her hair is short, but I think it's almost definitely a girl.

Unlike the other trainees, she had two more daggers on her belt, one on either side, and her pockets that I used to call a biscuit pouch in my past life, were currently filled with freshly harvested Shock Shrooms.

"Did you call for me?"

A slightly dull voice. +1 danger level.

"Why do you have those mushrooms."

"Ah..."

For a moment she was lost for words and looked at me warily. +1 danger again.

"W, would you like to try them?"

With a shaking hand she took out a mushroom from her pocket and offered it to me.

Mm. No. Do I look like I've lost it?

I don't want to die yet.

"I'm alright."

"It, it's tasty."

Contrary to her words, she put the mushroom back in her pocket with a relieved expression.

She really did pick those to eat...

Yep. Danger -20.

But if the enemy, no, some reincarnated kind-hearted hero was her enemy, she would most likely turn coat if she was baited with food, so raise the danger level back again. I'll just leave the final danger evaluation as 'high.'

"Eat these while you wait."

"Thank you very much!"

Wow, look at this kid.

Just a few strips of jerky and her voice hits the high octaves.

For a complete evaluation I immediately added another line to her notes.

-If she is not fed she has a high risk of sticking her knife in one's back, so at the very least feed her well no matter what.

"No way!"

As I diligently recorded my trainee's evaluations as an instructor, the communications magician beside me gasped in horror again. What was it? Did the kids get hit by the shrapnel from the barrage? I thought as I turned my head.

"What the hell."

Another crazy bitch, no, this time a crazy bastard was added to the mix.

Chapter 5

I Didn't Know Then (5)

#5 Their Story: The future hero's story

Silver rain in the night sky.

But that was only due to the moonlight reflecting off it.

In reality, they were chunks of ice being dropped from extreme heights.

Destructive enough to annihilate anything on the ground, the devil's strategy that sent two armies to hell in the Great War.

But right now, it was merely a backdrop for a beautiful dance.

Weaving through the rain of destruction with light footsteps.

And following behind those footsteps are indiscriminate destruction.

But the destruction never reached that small frame.

One step, and another.

The slightest deviation from the path meant being turned into unrecognisable meat paste.

But the girl in front of us was walking that path while smiling.

Everyone held their breath.

The screams of despair were gone now. All that could be heard was the sound of the silver rain's destruction.

How much more time passed since then?

“What the hell.”

Someone’s curse seemed to be the end where she passed through the silver rain of nightmares.

And I, seeing the girl rummage on the ground after slipping through the violence oh-so-easily clenched my fist as I stared at her back.

I knew perfectly well who she was.

My exact counterpart.

If I was No. 1, the foremost, then she was No. 1000 or the very last.

Up till now I didn’t put much meaning into the No. 1 title.

No, I actually thought it was natural.

Although I had been sent here as a sacrifice of a hierarchy struggle, I had been trained in one of the pillars of the Empire, the Raina Dukedom’s training style, and I learned from the best knights since the age of 5.

I trained myself following my father’s words that I had to be the best, and I never thought I would lose to my peers.

But now, I was so ashamed and embarrassed at myself.

As someone that served the empire I knew full well what that silver rain was.

The six year war where seven nations, including the empire had fought among each other leading their vassal and allied states.

In the battle that began when he was born, the Empire was victorious, and that tactic had been instrumental in securing victory. That was why he feared it.

He thought that the evil organisation had simply mimicked the technique that only the empire was able to use.

That was a fake.

That was not the strategy the empire used.

Just an imitation.

Not the empire's high-class skill, but a simple trick.

Because of that, I didn't realise. Simply because of fear.

As soon as I realised that I picked up my sword and ran.

"Do have a death wish?!"

A sharp scream.

It probably belonged to the kid that had been keeping all the kids in line since earlier.

The girl with sharp eyes that could recognise the umbrella.

But unfortunately her sharp eyes meant that she couldn't recognise something either.

One step, then another.

Behind my footsteps, the sound of rattling earth.

The slightest nick would completely shatter my body, but I couldn't stop my feet.

How much more time passed.

The longest time, but also at the same time the shortest of instances passed and somehow I managed to arrive where No. 1000 and the instructor was waiting.

No. 1000 was sitting on a small rock munching away at something.

As I walked in front of No. 1000 who had the same apathetic expression at both the sound of destruction behind my back and me in front of her, she looked up at me with those apathetic eyes.

“I’m not going to lose anymore.”

I said strongly to my opponent, no, to myself.

No. 1 and No. 1000 are irrelevant. The numbers from primary training should end at primary training.

Humans are beings that only ever move forwards.

So I will acknowledge it.

The being in front of me is currently the first existence that had ever surpassed me, and was my rival.

And on this day, I first developed my indomitable mind that instilled me to never give up, no matter what.

...Ah, except for one.

#6 Their Story: Ria El Nermia

“That, is that possible?”

“I heard about it through the rumours, but is it really all up to its reputation?”

Goddamn it...

Listening to the whispers around me I could only sigh.

Just why was I suffering so much in this place?

Even like this, I was part of the strongest nation on the continent, the Karuan Empire.

And within the Karuan Empire, if you were to ask who were the strongest clan of magicians, nine out of ten would say the family of the Nermia Earldom, and I was their second daughter.

There was only one reason I came to this organisation named Howling.

In Howling, there was the possibility that the second half of the clan's swordsmanship manual and the clan seal was here in this place.

One day, my grandfather, the previous head of the family, currently having given up his right to lead the family, and living life as someone in the Wizards' Tower visited home for the first time in three years.

And as Father was working on documents, Grandfather snatched away the seal he was using with a horrified look on his face.

It was then the family realised that that seal was not real, but an extremely well-crafted fake, and after that, multiple investigations were conducted through which we found that the second half of the clan's swordsmanship manual had also been stolen.

The Nermia Family was a founding family of the Empire and a prestigious clan that produced many mages and sages.

To Nermia, swordsmanship was simply a self-defence technique for mages, and so that itself wasn't much of a problem.

No, at the time, the magical physical strengthening being developed by the royal family was even more effective, so you could say that swordsmanship was essentially all but pointless. To be honest, it didn't matter too much if it was gone.

But the seal was different.

All the family's affairs were ultimately the responsibility of the family head, and the object that represented the family head was none other than the seal.

The seal was the family's diplomatic symbol and arguably the symbol of the family itself, and if it became known that the seal that had been used since an unknown time was possibly a fake, then this wouldn't end simply at being a stain on the family's honour.

If this became known elsewhere, if they really pushed and desired so, all the contracts that used the seal up till now could be rendered null and void.

Because of this, the family's children who knew the truth unofficially searched the land to look for the seal, and my choice was to infiltrate as a member of the evil

organisation Howling, which had the most possibility of having it.

There was opposition from the family saying that it was too dangerous, but if I'd stayed as I was, I would not have been strange for me to be married off to some high-ranking family's son or worse, sent off to some old high-ranking noble's bedchambers. To raise my status within the family I chose to stake my life.

According to the family's information network, I was sold off to a slave merchant that had frequent dealings with Howling, safely infiltrated the organisation, and there were little problems in primary training.

On the contrary, due to my basic training till then, I was able to achieve the high rank of No. 17.

But.

'I should have just married some high-ranking family's son... '

As I stared at the silver rain in front of me I cursed me of the past that had rebelled against my lot.

Just what was that?

Let alone the Nermia Family, the strongest magician family in the Empire, no, all the Wizards' Towers in the continent, the worst magic that everyone with even a fleeting interest in magic desperately studied, the extreme altitude bombardment magic!

What was more, the umbrella that was tossed to us, the more I looked at it the more I was certain that it was authentic Empire craftsmanship that the family had been studying.

It increased the efficiency at which one could cast barriers, added physical defence to said barrier, and also the ability to reduce the speed of an object so that it could be stopped by the barrier, a specialised defence staff developed specifically to counter the high-altitude bombardment.

But just because it existed, it didn't mean that a bunch of kids who had only learned the absolute basics of magic that the Nermia family taught their children at the age of four, could use it properly at all.

Thankfully at least it seemed like the instructor had no real intention to kill us, because compared to what we were taught at home, this bombardment was nothing short of sloppy.

The most likely solution to this problem was for half of us to use our mana casting the barrier spell, and the other half attacking the projectiles slowed by the barrier.

Just when I was thinking to myself of how to approach this plan to the others.

‘What’s going on?’

One person steps forward into the barrage.

No matter how sloppy the spellcasting was, it could and would still kill you in a single hit.

Whether to make us despair or to make us cooperate, what was certain was that we most certainly weren’t meant to walk straight in like that.

‘What?’

But there was nothing stopping her light footsteps as she breezily walked out of the bombardment.

It wasn’t that the mages in the sky were deliberately avoiding her.

The single weakness of this spell was that it was impossible to focus on a specific target.

It was a simple spell that simply fired an object from the sky to fall to the ground at insanely fast speeds.

If someone could control that fire then it would be more realistic to call them a dragon than a human.

But was she dodging them on sight? That makes even less sense.

No, every now and then she dodges by spinning and turning as if she was dancing, but

other than that she was moving in a straight line. Her line of sight was facing only forwards, never to the sky.

This was the realm of foresight. If she was a step late at any moment she would be swept away by the barrage.

But she didn't. The projectiles missed her by the absolute skin of her teeth, but none of them could so much as leave a scratch on the small girl.

We could only stare blankly. As we stared, at some point, we noticed the girl's figure outside the range of fire.

'Is that possible?'

It's possible. I saw it with my own eyes. That was an undeniable truth.

'Can I do it?'

Impossible. It wasn't that my own physical capabilities were bad, but that was long beyond the realm of simple physical ability.

I was not an idiot pinning her hopes on some futile possibility.

"What was that?"

"Could you just pass right through it?"

I can hear the voices of my peers around me.

To be honest, even I wondered for a second there whether the bombardment was just illusion magic.

I even wondered whether it was illusion magic that incited fear in us as well.

But the conclusion was [this was not an illusion.]

It was then.

"Do you have a death wish?!"

When everyone was stunned, someone ran forward.

Familiar blond hair. No. 1, who had overwhelmingly claimed the number 1 spot during primary training time and time again.

But even if he was, mimicking those movement was nothing short of...

“It’s possible?”

It wasn’t the same. If the former had the light steps of a girl out on a walk, the latter was like a lion charging to his objective.

But the results were the same.

In the face of the overwhelming charge, it came close several times but the bombardment couldn’t touch him.

And the current reality was that seeing No. 1 and No. 1000 who had reached the other side, people could hear their comrades’ voices.

One might be a miracle, but since two had made it across, it seemed like they were thinking they could make it as well.

Ahh, goddammit!

I worked so hard on my team composition and plan! Leaving No. 1000 aside, I had No. 1 as a key role in my plans, but now I have to leave them both out.

And even the idiots who were slowly moving to try it themselves!

Although I wanted to let them just give death a shot, pointless loss of war potential was a loss to me as well.

So let’s teach them something.

“You insane imbeciles. Look closely.”

Making everyone else pay attention to me with a more-than-slightly annoyed voice, I lifted a relatively heavy rock with magic.

Its size was slightly less than twice that of my head.

“This is your skulls.”

It was a bit heavy, but I put some force into it and threw it to where the bombardment was still falling.

Thankfully, it flew far enough to reach its destination.

Thump!

A soft but weighty sound.

Bang!

As I pointed to what remained of its fragments after it was hit by the bombardment, I said.

“Now, anyone with a skull thicker than that rock. Get out there and take a shot.”

Having come to terms with reality, the kids closed their mouths. It’s better than them being noisy.

“Now unless you’re some sort of rock head master than can pour magic power into your head, listen up.”

After everyone’s attention turned to me, I lifted the staff in my hands.

“The idiots who don’t want to go back to primary training needs to put up their umbrellas, and avoid the rain, no?”

Now then. Although not quite like those two idiots, but let’s put my life on the line.

Chapter 6

I Didn't Know Then (6)

“There we go.”

Aside from just over ten people, the rest of them got together and began to move.

The trainee who had noticed the umbrella's identity first coolly took the lead in creating a barrier magic with her at the centre.

The rest started to move forward at a quick pace as they defended against the bombardment.

To be honest I had considered calling this session off due to a certain pair of lunatics. No, even if it was only one that jumped in then you could safely assume that they were a lunatic, but the fact that the next one also succeeded created doubt, and because of that you could have all sorts of moths jumping straight into the fire.

Especially those who haven't experienced the Great War and heard only through rumours, and only the brief mentions in primary training, there will be kids who will be wondering if those rumours were true or exaggerated.

If it's the kids who haven't experienced first-hand the numbers that were fucked over by this bombardment then you can literally see as a number.

Hearing of hundreds of casualties is a hell of a lot different to seeing said hundreds of casualties in person.

If it were the ones who were on the front lines they could understand the numbers but it would be foolish to expect the same understanding from these kids.

That is the limits of these kids with no practical experience.

They could understand just how big several hundreds are if they get surrounded by that amount of enemy forces on an assignment, but that sort of training is impossible

here.

It's an evil organization, but we don't recklessly kill young kids during training.

As a primary trainee, even at the risk of reeducation safety first is how we do things, and even once they become an advanced trainee, with the exception of practical experience, the core doctrine is to minimize casualties.

No matter that it's been easier to get fresh bodies due to the fact that the Great War has caused the number of orphans have risen greatly in these past few years, in an evil organization where the vast majority of the work we do is illegal, we need to be aware of the risk that we could die at any time.

Because of this, the places called evil organizations are always in a labour shortage.

To solve this, we educate children from a young age and continue to bolster our numbers, but the cost involved in this is no joke either.

Before the Great War brought down the cost to a pittance, on average it cost twenty silver, fifteen lately due to the drop in prices, to bring in a child, but when you multiply that by hundreds, thousands, then it's not a cost you can wave off.

Plus the cost of feeding them, clothing them, training costs and so on, when you put them all together you wonder it might be just more cost-effective to hire an adult, but there are way too many spies from other organizations and countries, so for the most part we can only use young orphans or slaves.

Because of this, I don't kill anyone.

Perhaps even in my employee evaluation I might be appraised as a skilled instructor with no casualties, all the while fostering a high sense of fiscal responsibility!

Since I bring results, it's not that my education is wrong, but the ones who couldn't handle it are too weak! Is the final evaluation!

"Thirty-seven."

It's a respectable result.

The twelve remaining over there will be sent back to primary training with the fifty-one other kids sprawled in their beds, but that's none of my concern.

The kids that failed are already out of my hands, but are in the hands of the primary training instructors instead.

"Time to go back now."

No. 1000 who was on her third strip of jerky, and No. 1 who was staring at her with a feverish gaze.

Did he fall for her? Did he fall?

Oh, a love story rare in this evil organization!

...Yeah, right.

It's been a long time since I discarded those delusions you might find in a rofan(1) novel.

I just have to hope and pray that No. 1 doesn't backstab No. 1000 during a mission out of a jealousy.

No matter where you go, the majority of the beings called No. 1 are the ones that can't stand the presence of someone above them.

When I turned my head, while weak, I could see the resolve of the trainees that were now veterans of the Empire-style magic bombardment.

They all looked tired, but they still had resolve.

Yep, that's how it should be.

If they lost resolve from just this then it would be very hard to educate them.

I prefer comfortable and simple training methods. Of course, not comfortable and simple for the trainees, but comfortable and simple for myself.

"Congratulations for surviving the infamous Empire bombardment."

First raise their spirits a bit, then sign to the communications mage beside me.

“...Are we really doing this?”

“Yes.”

Maybe it was just my imagination but the mutterings “Oh, gods, why...” were probably just my imagination.

The training we’re going to do from now on is much simpler to dodge than the Empire-style magic bombardment, no?

Plus even if you’re hit by it you’re not going to die?

Over the heads of the trainees that had their attentions trained on me, a faint magic circle shimmered.

I could have all signs of it removed altogether, but that’s for the last day.

Since I am not that much of an evil instructor I will give them time to get used to it.

Didn’t they always say humans were animals of adaptability? They can simply adapt to this as well.

“Since you survived that highly-infamous bombardment, a normal one should be easy?”

As a few of them stared horrified at the sky, this time, not silver, but a multicoloured rain began to fall.

“Now, splendid trainees that survived the Empire’s magic bombardment, this time it’s the organization’s favourite magic bombardment. Ah, we are controlling it so you won’t die if you get hit, but you could still die if you keep getting hit, so be careful!”

Perhaps they didn’t all hear me, they were very busy running away.

Scanning and forgetting, no, in one ear and out the other? As an instructor this saddens me.

“Now, then. Shall we play for just a week?”

For the kids who might have my retirement on the line, I shall feed them experience like a high-end restaurant chef.

To start, the first menu is a premium set of all the magic bombardments they could face on the battlefield.

#7 Their story: A certain organization’s HR manager’s struggle.

“Ahhhh...”

I read the reports from the organization’s mages.

A simple summary would be a devil’s training that was impossible to survive.

Evaluated as something that they wouldn’t be able to survive at that age, no, not even in the present day.

If it was any other department, and if the person responsible for that training was anyone other than Instructor Naruan, you could be very much justify swearing at them for weaklings.

But even in an evil organization mages are special.

Perhaps if they were magicians who holed up their rooms researching or stayed in the backlines spending all their mana for a single blast.

But they’re mages.

In both the front and back lines as a given, infiltration, bombardment, assassination and all sorts of other missions, to think that a veteran special ops mage corps would provide this evaluation!

And even the results only recorded three surviving out of a hundred!

Starting from the Empire-style magic bombardment, for a continuous week of magic bombardments without any time for rest.

No matter that they were given an Empire-style defense staff that was effective for defending against magic, the fact that three people actually survived as their bodies wore down over the week makes them the monsters.

It wasn't that the trainees were weak, either.

A whopping thirty survived for five days.

Only thirty-seven survived after the Empire-style bombing, but thirty survived after that!

They independently dug holes, searched for cover, created bases and temporary shelters, and setting aside that these were all these kids' death struggles, it's proof that these kids have extremely good survival skills when you consider their age.

Maybe rumours already spread, but the various special ops forces are already requesting even the dropouts.

Heck, even he'd want them. Especially the five that dropped out on the final day, wasn't due to magic bombing but the organization's specialty mid-range silent sniping.

This was a skill we used a lot even during assignments, hard to block even if you knew it was coming, outright impossible to block if you didn't.

The mages rated these five highly as 'humans,' and the three that survived the mages didn't even think of as human, calling them monsters and such with ambiguous words that were hard to tell whether they were compliments or insults.

-Final Evaluation-

No. 1 – Lunatic. Very skilled with a sword but doesn't seem to be in his right state of mind. Seems to have the potential for magic but may be dangerous if taught. Giving dangerous glances to No. 1000. Treat with caution.

No. 17 – Superior magical talent. Potential as both a magician and a sage. Has a habit of using her comrades as chess pieces. While her magic use is splendid, her use of people is even better. Confirmed reports of her sending her comrades to the expected snipe location. Shows extremely good talent as a villain.

No. 1000. Lunatic. Survival king.

Doesn't feel like she'll die no matter where you send her. There is the risk of betrayal if there is a skilled chef with the enemy, hence a fitting individual for missions in deserts or wastelands.

As I summed up the mages' evaluations I could feel the beginnings of a headache coming on.

A newbie might see this as the trollings of the mages, but I already knew from the last batch of Instructor Naruan's graduates two years ago that their final evaluations were very similar to the current crop.

Especially, one person in particular was a special crazy bitch.

"Heeh, are these my juniors?"

"Eh, ehhhh?"

My heart stopped for a bit at the sudden voice behind me.

Why is this insane bitch here at this timing!

"Why are you so surprised?"

"N, nothing, vice-director."

Harnel Sia.

The youngest-ever vice-director of one of the cores of the organisation, the Intelligence Agency.

The person that that picky Intelligence Director had evaluated as someone who could be relied on to take over at any time, one of Instructor Naruan's former disciples.

Once, when I was lacking in belief, I took this joke-like evaluation and stormed off to take the writer to task, and after I met with the examiner in question, was told to go check it out for myself and when I first went to Instructor Naruan, she was the first disciple I met, and the one who made me understand that very evaluation.

The fears from then were engraved into my body to this day.

-Heeeh. I see. You're the man from HR.

-Is there a post where I can be together with Master?

-No? Really? Reaaaaally? With. Your. Life. On. The. Line?

All that from a girl who'd probably lived not even half of his age.

No matter that I was a support worker, one that dealt largely with paperwork, but back when I was young I'd run around on many a battlefield, and the bloodthirst that she let off that I'd never experienced on any battlefield made me understand that evaluation.

"Don't be so scared. It's all thanks to Mister Manager that I could rise to the seat of vice-director?"

The vice-director's beauty was stunning to the point that rumours had circulated suggesting that she got the post by selling her body.

If this was a social gathering in the Empire's capital, there'd be no shortage of young noble boys that would have gathered to see that gentle smile.

But I know that smile. When I felt the greatest risk to my life, when I said that the closest place she could watch Instructor Naruan from was the Intelligence Agency, that was the sort of smile she made.

"Heeh~ This group, over half of them are women?"

She quietly exclaimed, but my arms were already ridden with goosebumps.

Ahhh... The trainees who survived that training from hell!

Those devilish talents, perhaps even actual devils, two of them will die!

"Ah, that's not it."

Her bloodthirst vanished.

Although my back was soaked in a cold sweat I did my best to not let it show with a composed face.

If I wanted to live...

“The last five dropouts from Master’s training, I’m here to take them on the orders of the Intelligence Director. Please make the arrangements.”

I looked at the hand-written document from the Intelligence Director and nodded. Perhaps the winner of the power game this time was the Intelligence Agency.

As I completed the simple paperwork, handed over the requisite files and watched her leave with a tense heart.

My accursed ears picked up her small murmurings.

“Ahh. My cute little juniors. Shall I pay them a visit?”

Ahhh, gods.

Save the young devils from the claws of the devil.

Chapter 7

I Didn't Know Then (7)

“Is it that tasty?”

As I said that watching the three kids scarf down a simple bread and soup, No. 1000 nodded as if she had no time to waste talking, No. 17 blushed slightly and No. 1 said brazenly.

“The food is not tasty, we are hungry.”

But unlike his attitude he quickly slapped away No. 1000's hands away from his bread.

It's not like I couldn't understand them. It's probably because it's been a while since they ate food fit for humans.

After serving them a seven-day full course of every type of bombardment the organization had to offer, they were given a pouch of jerky and moved immediately to the mountains. Just as they got over altitude sickness, a raft in the middle of the ocean. And after hearing that they were sick and tired of water, they had magic-sealing cuffs normally used for mage prisoners shackled onto their arms and thrown into the middle of the desert.

Even then, No. 1000's survival ability was magnificent.

An appetite that would even let her eat poison mushrooms for the taste.

Maybe she has some Poison Immunity MAX that you'd only find in novels, but even if she eats poisonous mushrooms she shows no signs or symptoms of poisoning.

I thought for a bit whether it was some type of mushroom I didn't know about, but then No. 1 tried copying her and immediately rolled his eyes back frothing at his mouth, I even had to use an emergency antidote to barely save him.

On the ocean, they caught a lot of fish, but her skills at cooking fish just right with basic

magic were particularly praiseworthy.

Even No. 17 who's a magic prodigy occasionally burns hers, but No. 1000's skill where she didn't burn her fish, not even once, was close to miraculous.

Her final actions in particular, in the desert, had even me horrified.

Without even a hint of hesitation, as soon as their drinking water ran out, she immediately bottled her own piss in her water canteen!

The other two were horrified at No. 1000's actions, and continued looking for an oasis, but there was no way I'd be that easy on them.

Since I had brought them all to a place where I had already determined there was no oasis, it was fun watching them gradually drying out.

Especially when No. 17, who had held out till the end finally drank her own urine, just when the shame and humiliation started to fade away from her face, when she asked me how to gather water, as I showed her how to use leather to gather morning dew and cacti as a water source, her soulless dead face was absolutely priceless.

And roughly two months of training passed by like that, and now we were back at our beloved barracks.

After a simple meal, I decided to give them a rest day today.

Although I was being quite benevolent, I don't think my disciples appreciate their teacher's kindness.

"Today... Then what's happening tomorrow?"

"...Again?"

Although their three horrified stares stung a bit, I need to endure.

Yes, the heart of a teacher must be as high as the sky and deep as the sea!

"You may rest until the sun rises tomorrow morning."

But their suspicious looks still haven't disappeared.

Ahhh. In that case.

“Or should we start now?”

“We’re okay!”

“Thanks for the break!”

“I’ll come out when it’s dinnertime.”

As I looked at them hurriedly turn around and head to the dorms, I sighed.

Why do all my disciples have such little faith in their instructor?

As I walked out pondering this, an exclamation just naturally sprang to my mouth.

Look at those dorms! Perfectly restored! Even if it looks like that it’s a specially made dormitory.

It was made so that the higher you go, the less risk there is of someone dying from the building collapsing.

Since the building collapses at least two, three times a year, it was made easy to destroy, easy to fix, light and cheap.

Perhaps the only downsides were that the roof blew off during a storm every now and then, and the building was sometimes cut in half when the kids were fighting?

Well even so, if you make them come out and start surviving, then emergency weather activity training complete! No matter that this is a fantasy neighborhood where magic is life, the power of mother nature is fearsome even here.

You need to overcome those environments in order to be tenacious enough to not die wherever you go.

Oh, thinking about it, trapping them in a cave-in like the dormitories seems like a good training plan.

Survival where there isn’t the faintest speck of light! Should I try drawing up a plan? I thought as I entered my office.

“Oh, Master, welcome...”

Slam!

Something weird is inside.

Mm. why is she here? It's been ages since she graduated, why is she here?

I opened the door again.

“Master! Why did you shut...”

Slam!

I shut the door again. Yep. It's her. It's common sense to avoid the local mad dog when she's around.

Plus, if it has rabies, it is highly recommended that you run away as fast as possible. If you get bitten while fighting it's only your loss.

“Master? Master? If the door doesn't lock from the outside, then Master is holding onto it, right? Is it alright when your ex-disciple is here and not letting her in... Wait, no, not letting her out?”

This is the problem. The heavily shaking doorknob. I'm holding onto it as hard as I can, but the moment I let go, I'm caught.

“Master? Are you listening? Can I think of this as confinement play? To think Master had these kind of preferences...”

She's bullshitting something, but I ignore it. The door handle is shaking more violently but it feels like it's going to break at any moment.

“What are you doing, Instructor?”

But salvation came at the most perfect timing.

“What is the problem, No. 1.”

“Ah, I came to replace the equipment damaged in the desert.”

“Alright then, hold onto this door for a minute.”

With a quiet voice, I call No. 1 over and have him hold onto the door, and put some effort into it.

Even though he looked confused, No. 1 held on to the door with all his strength, and I turned around and gapped it as fast as I could.

Let's run first.

The others are problematic in their own right, but that one is particularly troublesome.

She's oddly similar to my previous workplace's boss, and her crazy bitch personality is also similar and hence even more uncomfortable.

It's dangerous to be bare-handed. In that case I should prepare at least the minimal weapon for self-defence. The training's going to progress to the next stage soon enough anyway, so I might as well grab it early.

#8 Their story: The future hero's troubles

My heart that was fired up against No. 1000 cooled quickly.

After surviving the Empire-style magic bombardment, then the other assorted magic bombardment that followed shortly afterwards. At the very least it was easier to endure. If my body was normal that is...

My entire body was screaming at me as I pushed it beyond its limits. Most of the others had their mana strained to the limit and were in similar conditions to me.

Only No. 1000 maintained her easygoing slowness like normal, but it didn't seem like she was going to lend a helping hand anytime soon.

One person, then two people fell.

Each person squeezed out their non-existent mana to dig a trench, hid behind natural obstacles to get out of the line of fire, and when they barely intercepted an attack,

someone shouted.

“There’s something there. Sniper!”

We couldn’t understand what they meant immediately. We’d already been holding out for five days under heavy fire, people dropping out wasn’t out of the ordinary.

It was a coincidence that we found out what that actually meant.

When No. 17 abandoned the temporary shelter that was all but obliterated by enemy fire, and was about to head elsewhere.

She sent the person that was with her in another direction.

To an area that looked like a perfect place to get sniped.

“Kuwuk?!”

I saw it. The figure of the person collapsing as if he’d been hit out of nowhere. But still! To think that it was a magic shot that left no traces of magic!

To make matters worse, in the middle of heavy bombardment, and now with stealth magic! How the hell are you supposed to block that!

“They’re blocking it well.”

But No. 17 and No. 1000 are blocking it with ease.

Generally the shot came the moment the bombardments destroyed the obstacles people were hiding in, but surprisingly enough they blocked it well, and dodged it well.

Did that mean there was a separate way to block it?

I had to take two hits before I realised.

The first shot in particular hit me in a very poor place, I could only barely defend against it by pouring all my magic into it.

Ah, where exactly that place was is dangerous in many ways, so I’ll leave out that

explanation.

The solution is quite simple. While on standby, spread a layer of mana out extremely thinly, and act like a sensor.

While mana is being used at a very high rate, the moment I started to use that I found I could deal with it. Now, I can take whatever you throw at me!

Aaand the moment I thought that, training over. After telling us good job and tossing us a bag of jerky, he threw us into the mountains.

It was there where I came to learn of altitude sickness for the first time.

I didn't even know this illness existed. The Empire doesn't have too many mountainous regions to begin with, and even the mountains it had weren't that high above sea level.

Because of that I couldn't eat properly, but No. 1000 was happy that there was less mouths that ate. Because of that the moment I felt well enough to eat properly I stole one of the mushrooms No. 1000 was roasting, and thanks to that I saw my deceased mother's face that I'd only ever seen in paintings.

She sent me back saying it wasn't my time yet, if I'd followed her I'd have died then and there.

And we hunted beasts in the mountains, roasted them, this wasn't so bad... Just as we thought that, training over.

It was annoying that training ended just as we were getting used to it, but now for some rest...

There was a time where I thought such things.

I relaxed and closed my eyes, and when I woke up we were on a raft in the middle of the ocean.

All we had was a single fishing rod and a small bowl, one oar. End.

Of course even though we could slake our thirst through water magic, there was no

food.

Just then, we realised just how good the environment was up in the mountains.

We could hunt animals to eat, and if there were no animals we could eat grass and roots!

But we couldn't even do that in the sea. The only thing we could very occasionally catch on a line without bait was seaweed.

In the end we dove in to catch fish, but that wasn't easy, either.

In addition, cooking the fish we caught.

The sight of our hard-caught fish turning to charcoal right in front of our eyes was something we couldn't bear to watch without crying.

As I looked at where sky met ocean far away in the distance, the inside of my head was also dyed in blue.

As our instructor rode in an extravagant cruise ship that was completely unbefitting of an evil organization that symbolised stealth, he looked at us that were half-insane and shamelessly asked.

"Where do you want to go next?"

No. 17 and I said we didn't want to see water any more, we said anywhere as long as there was no water. And that was the worst choice we could have made.

"When does this end?"

"Don't know. Don't talk to me, I'm thirsty."

As I said that, sprawled out on a sand dune in a dying voice, No. 17 replied with a very annoyed voice.

The sea was heaven. I didn't know just how valuable water was.

I glared balefully at the magic suppressing tool that was shackled to my right wrist like a chain, but it didn't seem like it would come off anytime soon.

The saliva had already long dried from our throats. In this environment where we swallowed more sand than saliva, the sandstorms were like hell.

Furthermore, despite how hot the days were, the nights were disgustingly cold.

Even if we tried to dig a hold to make a shelter, because the ground was sand, a single gust undid all our efforts. In the end we were all getting sick of surviving with a campfire on a rock.

“I got food.”

“...Scorpions again.”

And the worst thing is that there is nothing to eat.

The mountains were heaven in terms of food. The sea had a lot to eat as well once you got used to it. But the desert had nothing.

Scorpions. Lizards. Except just once.

Whether it was abandoned or lost, a camel came passing by and No. 1000 quickly caught it, aside from that time we had nothing remotely resembling meat.

Back then, we took ten big steps back as we looked at No. 1000 who drank the camel's blood instead of water, but thinking on it now, we should have drank up when we had the chance, and I still regret that to this day.

And so we struggled and training was finally over, and we were told to rest up for tomorrow, but where did it go wrong?

Was it that I had checked my equipment for early thinking that training would resume tomorrow?

And was the problem that there were faults a couple of items of gear? Or was it that I held onto the door that the instructor said the devil lived inside?

Maybe, all of them were the problem.

The door I was holding shut opened, or more accurately, destroyed, and from the

inside a beautiful woman came out.

That woman looked at me, smiled and said.

“So. Your last words?”

And I was hit with that opening. It was a mysterious beating. It was a refreshing beating. I was hit, it hurts, and it doesn't hurt.

“Kuhuk?”

My gaze that had been looking forwards was now facing the ceiling.

“Hm... Seeing as how there are marks left, it isn't perfect.”

As I barely managed to turn my head, I saw a metal stick around a metre long.

Was I hit by that?

“Hm... If I succeed then world conquest might not be impossible, but it's so hard.”

“Kuk kahaat?”

It's odd. It hurts. It hurts so much. But it feels good. What is this?

“I raised the pleasure output, but at this rate it's just a masochist production tool.”

With light hand movements, the metal stick struck my body.

What I felt was definitely pain, but when it came to my head it wasn't pain, but pleasure.

“Huwww... Huwuut?”

“Ah. Damn it. This is a failure.”

A disappointed tone. With those words the hand that was holding onto the metal stick stopped.

“Well, I'll leave the punishment for interrupting me meeting Master at that.”

As I quivered and shook on the ground, the woman who violated me brought her face to my ear and whispered.

“Also, some advice from your upperclassman. When you see something like this, run away immediately.”

She lifted her head and waved around the metal stick in front of my eyes, and unlike her voice up to now, she said with a serious voice.

“Once you see it, you can no longer die.”

The meaning of those words, I didn’t know then.

Chapter 8

What Is This. Scary. (1)

They say the three greatest necessities of man are food, clothing and shelter.

And if I were to choose, I would choose food.

If you do not have a house you can sleep rough, if you do not have clothes then you can roughly cover up, but if people do not have food, they die.

– From a certain hero's memoirs

I blankly stared at the training scene playing out in front of me.

“Die!”

“This time for sure!”

“You, suit defeat.”

Would the twilight of the gods, Ragnarok, have looked something like this.

-These, damn brats!

“Ice Buster”

-Kuaaaaaaagh!

No, if you look at the fire giant that was said to have been at its forefront getting the crap beaten out of him, it's more than possible to think that way.

If we look back a couple of months ago when this all started.

“From today onwards, we will begin a simple fitness training program.”

Although they were only three little squirts, even if you threw them out to work as a mercenary they'd be more than usable.

Although they lack experience to be an A rank, they'd be a B, B- at the very least.

Because if they weren't then they wouldn't be standing here right now.

And teaching those kinds of kids is very exhausting.

The realm of genius, that realm is one where if you teach them something they'll get at least one thing out of it.

Put another way, geniuses are the type that can learn ten, even twenty things.

And the moment I play out all my cards against those types, I become a useless instructor, and an instructor with no fear or respect is easy prey from that moment onwards.

Actually, the previous cohort started rebelling the moment they started getting used to the method keeping them in line.

So I moved onto the next step, but I need to assume there's no way of knowing when that will stop being effective as well.

Although in all honesty I don't think it ever will.

Because of this, for the times when I need an effective method that uses none of my cards.

"The training is simple. Just run for five kilometres."

A simple run. But. When the last conditions are added on it becomes different.

"It matters not what methods or means you use. You just have to not kill anyone. However. The person who arrives last, does not get to eat."

No.1000's blank eyes ignited.

Oddly enough that child always put her life on the line when it came to food.

To be honest her appearance in the desert as she chewed a scorpion's tail which was known to have poison was a wee bit too much even for me.

When she saw a desert fox that normal kids that age, no, even older people would normally think is cute, her bright smiling face that said she had found something to

eat even appears in my dreams sometimes.

To that kid, no, that bitch, not feeding her is the worst punishment.

But it seems like No.1 and No.17 haven't realised the severity of the situation.

#1 Their story: The future hero's hunger

The sky is white.

I'm hungry...

Anything's fine I just want to eat something...

"It's tasty!"

"It is."

The instructor is a devil.

Not being allowed to eat aside, but why do I have to stay at the dining table with them!

Right beside me, No.1000 is happily wolfing down her food and No.17 is nibbling away with a satisfied look on her face, and I realised what was holding me back.

To be honest, as a potential successor to a duchy I had my pride.

Just for food!

I still had my pride to focus on something as petty as that!

It was on the third day when I realised I needed to throw that pride to the dogs.

But still as a man, I couldn't let girls starve for something as simple as food but on the third day, I was at my limits.

The direct descendant of a duke.

Looking at it differently, it meant that as a direct descendant of a duke, starvation was unthinkable.

Sometimes in protest of my father's plans, his advisors went on a hunger strike, and now that I think about it they were very admirable people.

How did they last a week, a month.

Thinking about that when I did my best to run for lunch, a dagger flew in front of my face.

"Hey, wait!"

I hurriedly pulled out my sword and parried the dagger. I nearly died zoning out. If I die here then only my damn brothers will be happy about that.

Maybe No.1000 felt she couldn't relax with the gap that opened up, but after throwing the dagger she started to run like her life depended on it.

And closely behind her, No.17 ran with a slightly faster speed.

"Oi, at least give me one meal at least!"

I'm hungry!

As I put strength into my legs while yelling that in my mind, all of a sudden I could see the sky.

As I shakily stood, I looked at the ground to see that it was covered in ice.

While the heat is passing by, it's not even autumn yet.

But ice!

"These little..."

Grind. I grit my teeth and started running as fast as I could.

Sure, circumstances being what they are, but still. Their comrade is this hungry!

The instructor did say to not care about means nor methods, but she really tried to kill me!

I swung my sword, used magic and ran like hell.

I narrowly caught up, I was attacked, I fell behind, then I realised.

'I can't use my full strength because I'm hungry!'

They say a healthy body is a healthy mind.

To put it literally, in a hungry body, a hungry mind sets in and you can't bring out your full strength.

I should have noticed this. The opposition are in perfect condition.

Compared to them I'm simply a golem running low on mana.

When a golem runs out of mana, they become a simple rock statue.

But it took me too long to notice!

A day, two passed and oh my gods it's already been a week since I ate anything!

The skies looked truly white and the rocks looked like fruit.

Now, when I truly am down to my last resort.

Dinner time, a light run before mealtime.

But as I no longer had any strength left I collapsed on the starting line.

Aah, even though I felt like I was going to die the instructor still didn't give me anything to eat.

On the contrary, he's watching me closely to see if I'm sneaking anything to eat.

To think I'd die of starvation like this!

Not even my brothers that threw me into this mess would have predicted this!

“...Hey, are you alright?”

Ah, she's here. It's No.17. I never really expected anything from No.1000 to begin with.

No.1000 is something that lacks a human conscience.

I don't know what it is, but it's not human. I confirmed that in the mountains, the sea, the desert.

That bitch is someone who'd shave off and eat the ice from a glacier in the tundra.

Compared to her, thankfully, No.17 still had traces of humanity left.

“...uh... ma.”

“Hm? What was that.”

While she used her comrades to confirm the enemy snipers during training, it seemed that she still felt pity for someone that collapsed from hunger.

She still had the conscience to ask the instructor if I was allowed a single bite as I stared at her, drooling.

“uuu... Uhh...”

“Haa. Speak slowly and clearly.”

At my faint and cracking voice, she sighed and brought her ear close to my mouth.

Ah, sorry. But it's your fault for not noticing.

The instructor didn't let me eat, it wasn't like he didn't let me drink.

There's no way that my water-filled belly would ever lead to my voice cracking.

Although my conscience stings a bit, my hunger takes priority.

I whisper in the ear that came close to my mouth.

“Magic seal, magic chains.”

“Eh? Eh?”

Her flustered eyes look back at me.

Sorry. But I'm hungry.

I'd covered the pre-drawn magic circle with my body.

There's only one way to hold down the best magician out of all of us with magic.

An ambush with a pre-prepared spell.

If I were to use magic at the same speed as No.17 I would never beat her.

Of course, even if I tie her up first, she'll break it with time. So.

Ka-chink. Ka-chink.

"Oi, wait! What the hell! Release me!"

I shackled the cuffs and bindings I'd prepared earlier on her while and slim wrists and ankles.

In the gear storage that the instructor had said was freely available to us for training use, there were also handcuffs.

When he saw me taking these, the instructor looked at me passing by with a quaint smile, but that didn't matter right now.

"Sorry."

"You little shit!"

I could hear all sorts of curses from behind me, but I installed additional sealing magic circles and soundproofing magic circles beside her.

Ah, just in case, I also put the remaining handcuffs on her as well.

To be honest, it would have been great if we had the magic-sealing shackles we'd had on in the desert, but unfortunately they weren't in the storage.

Well, these will tie up No.17 for long enough.

And that day, I could eat food in second place.

It was truly delicious.



Training went even better than my predictions.

I never actually thought things would proceed this far.

The ones that had the best relationship between their peers, the second cohort that I was in charge of chose the order in advance and logically sorted out their eating schedules.

Even the previous cohort that were at each other's throats ended things simply as testing each other's skills, not with their lives on the line.

"Move!"

But this cohort is insane.
Over food at that.

"Die!"

The earth shook, knives flew. As if the idea that it was a shame for a swordsman to let their swords leave their hands was bullshit, he simply tossed his favourite sword at attacks he felt he couldn't block.

The incoming magic collided with the sword and exploded.

He pushed through the space where the poor sword met its end and charged forward.

"All of you. Get lost."

And a blue light flashed in front of No.1's face.

Sword ki at that age.

Even named swordsmanship clans' successors don't have many cases of sword ki users at that age.

Meaning that those geniuses are rare even in families where kids get a toy wooden sword at the age of three and hold their first actual sword at seven.

And a trainee at an evil organization, and one that hasn't been learning the sword for a few years using sword ki is nothing short of insanity.

And the process was even crazier.

Once, just once. No.1000 came last.

Maybe she let her guard down, or she took a coordinated attack by the other two, I don't know.

Because it's not like I keep an eye on them running all the time.

However in a corner of my mind I thought that it was natural that No.1000 would be in the top ranks, and it was like that every day, but that day there was an unexpected incident.

And the scene where she cried tears the size of chicken gizzard while watching No.1 and No.17 eat is still in my head to this day.

And after mealtime ended, as she swung her sword as if she was furious, sword ki formed at the end of her blade.

What kind of bullshit is this.

If you made her fast for a month then she'd become a swordmaster.

Or stick a sword in my stomach before that.

The training sessions that became even more fired up, the brats that improved on their own.

And so I decided to add some more fuel to the fire.

“If you come in first place I will give you a special meal.”

At those words, the kids that thought it was okay if they weren't last, started to fight even harder to claim top spot.

In all honesty I wasn't going to go this far either, just experiment with it for 2-3 months, but since their skills naturally improve just with a single person not getting to eat, I can't give it up.

After that, No.1000's overwhelming victories continued.

The differences in sword ki grew. Cutting magic, cutting swords.

To fight against that you need similar sword ki or even stronger magic.

And so No.1 awakened sword ki as well. All to block and dodge the sword ki aimed at his face.

Like an animal adapting to survive to its natural environment, No.1 awaked to sword ki in the face of No.1000's attacks all by himself!

And as the second round began to play out, No.17 came to me.

“I want to get stronger. Stronger than anyone else.”

With a very powerful rage and determination.

Chapter 9

What Is This. Scary. (2)

Rage.

That was the only thing that could explain the emotion burning within those eyes.

“It will be difficult.”

In all seriousness, as someone who uses magic as her primary focus this training is disadvantageous for her.

Magic requires a lot of preparation.

If you want to strengthen magic you need a catalyst or a magic formulation, ranged rather than close combat is easier, and if a swordsman comes into close quarters then all you can do is run like your life depends on it.

There’s a reason why magic users are split between magicians and mages even though both use magic.

The specialties between magicians who focus on a single massive shot compared to mages who utilize fine mana management for prolonged fights is completely different.

No.17’s base is as a magician.

Perhaps the primary training centers are skilled at teaching magic lately, but she’s the best magician I’ve seen from them to date.

But magicians always perform at their peak when there is someone protecting them.

In the current 1:1:1 format, especially when the both the other opponents focus on using a sword, she can’t help but fall behind.

In that case there are two methods.

Using assorted tools and a focus on close quarter combat to switch to a mage-type, or contracting with a summoned spirit and supplementing your fighting potential.

And the quickest method is naturally, the latter.

To begin with, mages need to suffer for at least a year on the battlefield before they can be accepted as mages.

And even then as newbies or brats.

If they can't accept this process then rather than a mage, they're treated as a flying maggot or a meat shield.

In reality, a mage is a crappy job where no more than three out of ten survive after being deployed to the battlefield, with no guarantee that you'd survive after that either.

When the enemies' number 1 priority targets conveniently come down to the front lines it's even easier to hit them, and the world's advanced in leaps and bounds lately, special arrows that tear through magic barriers like paper have been developed, so this is an era where if you have the funds, you can snipe off skilled magicians and mages from a long way away.

Because of this, rather than bothering to teach them those things for ages, it's much better to bring out a big, meaty summon to take a hit and train as a magician raining down overwhelming firepower from afar.

The disadvantage is that the mana consumption is massive, but normally a rearguard magician is never thirsty.

Because they have a mana potion at their mouths pretty much 24/7.

The downside being that they have to go to the toilet frequently.

In the past where I was cursed enough to have to participate in the great war I developed special diapers and made the magicians piss in their pants.

My, did I get a lot of resentment then.

But it's not like I wanted to do that either?

It was hard enough that if the magic artillery had to be stopped because one asshole had to go the bathroom the enemy's main force would swamp us immediately.

Those magicians didn't understand my efforts in developing a diaper that wouldn't stink even when they pissed themselves.

And so let's get a good sla... I mean summon.

There was something I wanted to experiment as well.

First, draw a summon circle on pre-prepared ground.

"This... isn't this a summoning circle for devils?"

Oh ho. The primary training centers, it seems they're teaching them really well lately. To think she'd understand what type of magic formation just by looking at it.

As the representative of the tertiary training instructors, I should send them a word of praise later.

Words don't cost money.

"So you know."

"Aren't contracts with devils banned under the Empire's laws?"

I sighed seeing No.17's slightly surprised face.

What is this moron saying.

"Long before we committed the crime of making a contract with devils, we're already members of an evil organization and hence perfect criminals."

"Ah..."

As No.17 made a stunned expression I continued drawing the formation.

Ah, now that I think of it, they don't teach them this in primary training. As a splendid

instructor I might as well tell her.

“And if you look closely at the Empire’s laws, making a contract with a devil isn’t strictly outlawed either.”

“Eh? What on earth is that...”

Even though I look like this at one point, I’d spent a number of years in the imperial court that stank of blood over the right of succession.

I diligently learned the laws because I didn’t know when my head would be sent flying if I didn’t.

Simply in terms of the Empire and international laws, I can go toe to toe with one of the Empire’s judges!

“Contracting with a devil is not a crime. Making a contract with your soul as the price is.”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

No you moron.

“Normally all summons are restricted by their class.”

Spirits and beasts are a given, you can even summon gods from other worlds here.

You even get cases where you get familiar names like Zeus, Odin and so on.

In addition, the major league of the 72 demons in the Lesser Key of Solomon, the Qliphoth, the mythologies of Greece, Northern Europe, the Orient and their demon kings and so on can all be summoned.

But among those, the devils’ destructive powers are unmatched. The reason being is the price of their summon, a soul.

“Only devils make a contract with souls as the price.”

They’re scammers among scammers.

Like loan sharks lending one million won and tearing back ten.

“Souls are the realm of things not even gods can interfere with, that only the creator gods who created the world and tasked the gods with looking after it can touch. A scam contract that tears that realm out under its name. because of this, those that make contracts with devils can use their souls as a price to obtain great strength.”

The running costs are too high.

If you were given a catalogue you'd never ever choose them, but unfortunately there are few specialist texts on summoning, and the ones that are on the market are so pathetic compared to what I know there's no point even looking at them.

“And that's why contracts are prohibited. Because devils are beings that infringe on the inviolable territory called the soul.”

“Then isn't it right that we shouldn't do it?”

No.17 said, tilting her head after a short moment to think.

Her appearance that actually matches her age is quite cute.

“Think differently. If devils are assholes that scam people using souls as the price.”

Thak!

The magic formation drawn with chalk was complete. Hm. This should work.

If it doesn't then No.17 becomes a criminal, but since she's a member of an evil organization she's already a budding criminal.

Well, the important thing is.

While a soul might get forked over to a devil, it's not my soul so that's not a problem.

Even if I did try myself, I have absolutely no mana so it's impossible for me to summon.

Even when I tried to contract a summon that someone else summoned I was refused.

Really, to hear from a devil that my soul was rotten, just what kind of bullshit is that?

And so, this will be my sacrifice for this experiment. The experiment name is.

“We can scam devils too.”

Will it be on the level of a certain demon’s contract?(1)

#2 Their story: the archdevil’s master’s story.

“We can scam devils too.”

What kind of revolutionary bullshit is this?

I said I wanted to get stronger, but I never wanted to be a criminal.

But, after listening to the instructor’s words, I’m already a future criminal.

If I get caught by the Empire’s soldiers, killing myself before I brought shame to my family was the right way to go.

‘Real seal or no. Should I just give up and get married?’

The more that I thought, the more shame I felt thinking whether this was what I came to an evil organization for.

The reason I was getting stronger was over food? I, the daughter of the Nermia earldom, one of the great families even among the many in the empire?!

‘No, this... this is all that damn No.1’s fault.’

To think he’d use someone coming to help him.

Worse, he’d put six cuffs on my wrists, seven on my ankles.

Clusters of cuffs on these frail wrists!

Even in the Empire which gave zero rights to criminals they didn’t even treat the death row inmates like this, and he did this to me, a weak little girl!

To think he’d use all sorts of magic formulations and cuffs on someone who was trying

to help, I felt to the bone why the phrase biting the hand that fed you existed.

And after that, as if his desire he'd been suppressing burst after that one meal, No.1 started running like a man possessed, and after that the number of meals I had were getting less and less.

To be honest, after the first few months of hell that the instructor put us through, the training itself wasn't that difficult.

On the contrary, they were amazingly normal and effective, and I was actually somewhat satisfied by the theories that I'd never heard of even in my family.

But that all changed after No.1000 failed to eat once, just once.

To the point that if I could go back to the past, I would run at myself of that time and stop me.

"Now that I think about it, No.1000 never missed a meal?"

All of a sudden the unfairness of the situation came to words, and No.1 agreed, and as a result of us cooperating we stopped No.1000 from claiming first place.

Her attacks that seemed like they were really going to kill us had our nerves on end, and I started to regret why did I put myself through this misery, but being faced with No.1000's sorrowful expression at mealtime filled me with a quaint satisfaction.

It went without saying I was on edge at that meal. I ate only using my fork.

Because No.1000 could have charged in at any moment, the knife in my left hand had to be on standby at any moment.

But No.1000 only cried and watched, she didn't lunge for the food.

After the food was gone, when I finally relaxed, the instructor said this to me.

"No.1000 knows the law of the strong feeding on the weak more than anyone else. That's why she feels resentful."

I replied instinctively at those words.

“That she was attacked by two people?”

“No, that she couldn’t hold out against Just. Two. People. And her weakness that prevented her from eating what should rightfully have been hers.”

Words that were difficult to understand. But unlike normal, the instructor smiled, a smile that sent a shiver down my spine, and disappeared after saying one more thing.

“You kids, may have awakened something that should have best been left sleeping.”

It was when I could no longer see the instructor’s back, that I realised that my back was soaked in a cold sweat

The next day, No.1000 used sword ki.

The week afterwards, No.1000 started awakening to magic by herself.

And after some more time passed, we could no longer beat No.1000 even with our combined assault, so naturally the alliance dissolved.

And when I realised it, I was the weakest among the three.

When it was easier, I could have made a contract with No.1 and just took turns eating and solved it peacefully like that, but even if I said that now it was far too late.

After a day, then two passed, the sense of danger was at my throat.

And my hatred for No.1 rose up again.

Although this is partially my fault, I don’t want to admit it!

“I offer my name and mana, and call your name.”

I’m reading the lines like I’ve been told to, but this feels weird. The lethargy that comes with all my body’s mana draining from me.

Not all devils are equal.

Low ranking devils can be contracted even without your soul if you’re skilled enough,

but high ranking beings, if handled wrongly can lead to a small kingdom's downfall.

The dangers of those have been documented far and wide.

Summon chants might be found in hidden old ruins of an era long gone, and as cases of accidental summons came to light, parts of the summon chant were made public, and the Summoners' Association made an announcement that any summoning chants with that part present should not be carried out.

And as a House of magicians, the Nermia family made frequent use of summons and had all sorts of knowledge on chants, and knowledge on devils as well, but this was the first time I'd encountered a chant like this.

"Thy, gatekeeper of Muspelheim, the great giant that set a world ablaze."

Ah, my head is screaming at me to shut my mouth, but this mouth of mine doesn't show any signs of shutting.

What, set a world ablaze?

Forget high-ranking demons, if it's like this it wouldn't be weird to expect an archdevil, or even a demon king.

"The one who completes the twilight of the gods, I call your name."

Ahh, twilight of the gods. It even sounds dangerous!

"The great giant of fire Surtr, descend to this realm, appear before my eyes!"

Ahh, it's too late. I have crossed the river of no return.

With the fatigue of magic draining from my body, I felt my heart hammering.

Ahh. This. Yep. Fear. This is because of fear.

"Are you that pleased?"

"Wh, what do you mean!"

As I looked at the sparkling magic formation, I snapped at the instructor's voice behind

me. Ahh, I can't afford to be hated...

"Then. What's that smile?"

Smile? I'm smiling? What kind of monstrous accusation is that?

Here, my heart is hammering with fear, there's no way I'd be smiling?

Haha. Really. Damn it.

I stared wordlessly at the instructor who'd brought a hand mirror out from somewhere and was reflecting my face.

Damn it. Talk about prepared.

Alright. I admit it. In the mirror there was a crazy bitch that was giggling like a maniac. With my face.

Alright. My heart is beating a bit, no, wildly fast.

The strongest nation in the continent, the Karuan Empire. And one of the great magician families that you'd rate on one hand within that Empire was the Nermia family. Even I, who'd read almost all the books in the family, had never heard about this giant called Surtr.

But, I can tell just by the chant.

This is an archdevil that would only be named in myths!

As a magician family, as a magician.

There is no way I could pass on learning something that no one else knows.

Judging by the instructor's words, I could make a contract even without using my soul, but there was no guarantee of success.

A dangerous gamble, with my soul on the line.

If you weren't excited here you weren't a magician, no?

How much time passed?

When the brightness of the magic formation reached its peak, a giant with a body red as fire appeared emanating an intense heat.

Bang!

“Are you the ones who brought forth Surtr, the master of Muspelheim!”

The giant of fire appeared by slamming his hand onto the ground. The moment my body filled with delight in the spirit.

“The price of your contract is naught but... Eh?”

The giant of fire who had been indomitably speaking made a very shocked expression before looking at the ground he’d slammed down on.

“Yep, naught. Zero. Nothing.”

The instructor’s fiendish voice echoed in my ears.

Chapter 10

What Is This. Scary. (3)

#3 Their story: A certain pushover slave's story

The final giant who once burned down an age of mythology.

The greatest archdevil who ruled over fire.

He was of another level above ordinary devils, the master of the giants, the lord of Musphelheim that even the gods feared.

That existence was I, archdevil Surtr.

And such a personage. Was.

"Bored."

It's boring. Too boring!

Just how long do I have to sit on this throne for?

My waist is starting to hurt from how long I've been sitting here for.

I'm actually training daily to create a strong first impression as an archdevil, but so what?

No one ever calls for me.

Well, I do understand. History is made when I move.

From what I heard from the kids under me, a couple of years ago something called the great war happened and the humans fought furiously tooth and nail and all, the moment I step forward I could turn even the great war into a children's scrap.

Because the one who once set an entire world ablaze, one of the highest among top-class devils, is me.

And because of that, I always ponder.

As I am such an existence, could a human summon me?

I've been spreading and scattering the method to summon me since what the humans called the Dark Ages, but humans, especially the ones who believe in gods, diligently collect them up and burn them.

They say to protect the world from devils that would threaten the world, you should stop the summoning from happening to begin with or something like that?

Thanks to that, it's about as hard as plucking the stars from the sky for devils like me to go out to the human world.

Of the ones humans call archdevils, how many of them are currently contracted out again?

Only two come to the top of my head. Even if I include any potential contracts by devils that I don't know of, I could probably count them on one hand.

What kind of contract rate is this pathetic? Isn't this way unreasonable!

At this rate being a high-class devil is probably better.

Because while we make a single contract, they make fifty.

Because they're somewhat strong and yet also somewhat weak, they're easily contracted.

What kind of injustice is this situation?

At least before Ragnarok I did my job as the gatekeeper of Muspelheim, but I was free after that!

And because of that it's been 5000 years since I last went down to the human world.

Sure, you say 5000 years, but since I don't know when I have to make a contract, I spend most of the day sitting on this throne!

You try sitting on a chair for the majority of 5000 years, it's boring as hell!

"If it's now I could give them a great bargain with a contract for only half their soul..."

A grand service that not even high devils won't do! And this Lord Surtr is offering this bargain sale!

Why are there no customers to make a contract!

I'm bored enough that if another 1000 years go by like this, I could even give them a free contract!

"Eh?"

Was my fervent wish answered?

An unfamiliar ripple formed in the air around the throne.

It's, it's a summon!

To think that there was still a human left that knew how to summon me!

I check my body.

Very good. The best condition. I could fight the gods right here right now.

Clear my voice.

Ahem!

Good. Deep and powerful.

I need to leave a strong first impression to make it easier to get a contract.

Even if you say that it's a contract with a human, you can't take it lightly.

The first contract in a whopping 5000 years.

If the human decides to not contract thinking I'm useless then it's only my loss.

So I need to make the best preparations.

I just need to get the contract first.

Once I make the contract, I can take everything from the contractor and burn the land in the best state.

Now, I'm off to the contractor, three seconds remaining.

Cover my body in white flames to leave an even stronger impression on my contractor.

Two seconds left.

I must not show on the outside that I was looking forward to this contract.

One second.

Finally, taking my signature pose, I lift my hand high.

Zero.

Bang!

"Are you the ones who brought forth Surtr, the master of Muspelheim!"

Appearing in a bright light and slamming the earth! The stone fragments that scattered in the surroundings were very satisfactory.

It was a spectacular summon. The summoner was probably surprised as well.

Because they wouldn't know they'd summon an amazing archdevil like me!

Now, what kind of summoner is the one that called me?!

Although I don't show it on the outside, I gather my excitement and look at my

summoner.

Youthful. No, young.

But to my eyes, an archdevil's, I saw overwhelming potential.

This is, what they call a genius.

Human yet far removed from humanity.

Undeniably, a figure that would leave her name in the history books.

Very good. Let's engrave my name with hers.

So that no one will fail to know her name and mine, in the name of fear and despair, I will engrave it in history!

But the contract takes priority!

"The price of your contract is naught but... Eh?"

Eh? What? My hand is hot?

As the giant who ruled over fire, it is very odd for me to feel heat.

My eyes naturally turn downwards.

Looking at the ground, the floor is shining.

While it goes without saying that a summoning circle should shine, the colour is weird.

I infused mana into my vision and looked down, and under the summoning circle, something was shining.

"Yep naught. Zero. Nothing."

As I stared at the ground in confusion, a man's voice came into my ear.

Naught? Zero? What kind of bullshit is this? And words became visible in my field of

vision.

[Contract between devil Surtr and [Ria el Nermia] – Geass Roll -]

The master of the burning land Musphelheim, archdevil Surtr recognizes contractor [Ria el Nermia] as his master.

Pledging obedience to her and all of her commands, and not acting independently without word from the contractor, he swears to the world to lend his unlimited strength and talents with **No. Compensation. Whatsoever.**

Fuck. What the hell is this.

◇ ◇ ◇

Ahhh, it's a success.

What are you, my fearsome brain!

Was I actually a genius! It's a pity that I'm wasting it in service to an evil organization, but too late for that.

Ahh. Shit. God damn it all!

If only my parents didn't pass away in the fight between the hero and villains.

No, even if that stupid lord didn't make the first gamble in his life and was fucked over by the Empire!

If then I could have become a grand figure like an isekai novel's protagonist!

Whoa now, calm down. That's all just a daydream, isn't it?

When I was alive the trending genre was where the protag basically suffered a lot.

Let's be satisfied with my big fat paycheck.

As I went through happy memories at full speed, I saw a very flustered mister lord archdevil.

"Wh, what is this!"

He probably saw the Geass Roll.

It cost quite a penny, but it's nothing less but a contract with the world as witness.

A contract not even gods can do anything about, a contract with the creators' authorities inscribed into it.

There are only three places in the entire continent where these are made on a small-scale only, where let alone other races, even the oil and water races that are humans and demons keep the peace, I bought a few of these while I was there, now is the time to use them.

Of course, the expenses will be passed onto accounting later.

"This, this is a scam!"

Yep. It's a scam.

I took the basis of this scam from a particular devil.

There was a mid-tier demon that the organization contracted with frequently, whenever he was summoned, he always appeared in green smoke with his arms crossed haughtily.

And when I had the chance, I asked the devil.

-Why is there always green smoke whenever you're summoned?

And the devil answered.

-Because this is how I respond to summons!

Hearing him out a bit more, apparently other demons were appeared in their own distinctive ways when they were summoned.

To get the precise details, I cooperated with one of my disciples and summoned a low-rank demon, when I **politely** asked him, he answered us.

In the case of the giant wolf in Northern Europe mythology, Fenrir, he howled for around a minute into the skies, the major league vampire Count Dracula appears by hundreds of bats combining into one.

There were three that seemed like they'd fall for the bait, and one of them was this Muspelheim's master Surtr.

He actually appears as he slams his hand into the ground.

Could you say his destructive summon is really appropriate for someone that destroyed a world?

From what I heard, once he appeared in an old cave system like that and buried his summoner in a cave-in.

Anyways, the contracts between humans and devils, no, the majority of the contracts between humans and devils are verbal contracts.

While in my past life they were theoretically binding but seemed of absolutely no benefit to me, here you can even give away souls with oral contracts.

In that case, what if you make a written contract?

With the person's thumbprint?

I prepared a stone plate, and placed the Geass roll onto it. With No.17's thumbprint firmly stamped.

Stage 1 preparations complete. And now, place that stone plate underneath the prepared floor, and on top, a specifically prepared ink plate, and on the very top, a normal looking floor!

And this stupid giant appeared with I am Surtr! And slammed! his hand down, the actually very thin ground broke under the impact, and firmly pressed his fingerprint down on the deepest layer.

"This, this kind of contract!"

Surtr started smashing the stone plate his thumbprint was on, but since the contract

was already made according to the Geass Roll, since the contents are already engraved onto No.17 and Surtr's souls, it doesn't matter what he does to that stone plate.

Heck I wasn't even sure if such a ridiculous method would work.

But would you believe it everyone it actually worked!

"Obedience? I can't even act independently? And with no compensation?"

Kuaaaaa! The giant that set a world ablaze roared!

Surtr was seriously strong.

He was strong enough to chew up Northern Europe's last hope Frey and burn down the world!

But so what.

Now he's a slave devil under a slave contract.

"No.17, tell him to shut up."

"Please shut up."

I looked at Surtr silently opening and shutting his mouth with oddly aggrieved eyes and nodded to No.17.

"It looks like it's gone well."

Well of course, due to the scam contract the amount of power he can exert onto this world is decreased.

No, even before that, if it was that slave contract an archdevil this proud wouldn't even want to show off his full strength.

But it's an archdevil?

He's fucked over an entire mythology?

Even if the key forces Odin and Thor were screwed over by monsters during the

Northern European mythology's war Ragnarok he's still a devil that set the world on fire?

If someone like that roams around then what kind of weak civilian, no, small-time criminal like me, without any mana, supposed to survive.

If the world burns, then there's nowhere for me to spend the money I spent half my life in an evil organization to earn?

And therefore a seal.

On the contrary, having been weakened is better.

Naturally. No.17 could more than backstab me sometime in the future.

In this place, even if she is my disciple, on the contrary because she's my disciple that she could knife me in the stomach.

And that place is called an evil organization!

And thus, I've become a hero that saved both my peace, and while I'm at it the world's peace!

...Mother, Father, I've become a hero that saved the world!

#4 Their story: the story of the actual hero who would save the world.

That day was just another day where we all fought with our lives to eat.

"Block it all Surtr!"

But unlike normal, at No.17's commands, a giant clad in flames appeared.

And the giant said.

"I am the archdevil Surtr, Muspelheim's master! I will protect this place on my master's command, if you wish to proceed, you must defeat me!"

...My departed mother.

They're saying if I want breakfast, I need to beat an archdevil.

This disgusting world.

Chapter 11

What Is This. Scary. (4)

Lately I've been sincerely considering retirement.

Evil organizations were always the type of things where you could come as you pleased, but not necessarily the same if you tried to leave, but thanks to my various hard-crafted escape routes and false identities I think I could manage if I ran.

The reason why I was thinking like so lately.

It's because of No.1000 who, with her eyes closed, refining her mana right in front of me.

Seriously, what the heck did I say for you to get enlightenment?

Maybe if I'd taught her the specifics of swordsmanship, but if only I rated No.1000's survival abilities highly I taught her single-strike kill assassination techniques.

They don't even have a name. I'm just teaching her a few of the techniques we use in the organization described with a bit of extra sauce.

But, she's getting enlightenment from that.

I'm just telling her how to stab and cut an enemy's critical points, what the hell is there to gain enlightenment from that!

All there is to learn is the human body's weak points!

Plus the point she gained enlightenment at was "the most important thing of the single-strike kill is to kill your enemy in a single attack."

Seriously, the name itself is a single-strike kill, no? but here she goes "ah..." like some wuxia protagonist gaining enlightenment and I'm afraid that if I really do teach her all my hidden cards then she'll transcend humanity entirely.

Alright. Leave No.1000 at that.

For a kid barely in her teens, let alone fear on seeing the archdevil Surtr, she just cut him down and moved on because he was in between her and her food.

The danger is that if I make her starve without reason then she might make a giant hole in my stomach, but she can be tamed well enough if you feed her so there's that.

But, what's No.17?

Since I can't use magic myself, all I know about magic is theory.

No, even what I call theory is just what I read about in the fantasy novels in my past life and pretending I developed them myself, but now this kid's getting enlightenment from that as well.

And she brings out what was only in novels and uses them in real life!

Was fiction not actually fiction!

Did all the fantasy authors in my past life go to some fantasy world and write an autobiography or something?!

And No.1 too, fell behind briefly before he caught back up at an amazing speed.

He's especially taking up my swordsmanship at an incredible rate.

No.1000 gained enlightenment, why wasn't I teaching him anything or so he complained and when I bullshat something from some martial arts novels I read and then he went on to attain enlightenment as well.

No, seriously, not even the previous cohort was this good, but these kids are growing so fast I have no idea what they're going to be when they do grow up.

-Kuuoooooooooooo!

The great fire giant roared.

“Ice Buster.”

-Kuooooooooak!

The great fire giant roared in pain.

“Earth’s Judgement”

Meanwhile, the completed magic caused the ground to shake and stone pillars shot up.

I’ve been in the great war that swept through the entire world, but to be honest, just this, whenever I look at this scene I get the shivers.

To think this scene is being played out by some kids that aren’t even fifteen yet.

And just why the hell can’t the organization conquer the world when these kids are born!

Just how strong are you, the world!

“Run rampant, Surtr!”

The designer-name sandbag Surtr charged in with his body clad in flames but No.1000 easily weaved through his swipes and overtook him just like that.

“Damn it!”

But between dodging No.1000’s hidden dagger, having been unable to dodge it immediately No.1 faced off with Surtr, and because of that it seems like No.1 is last again. Just as I thought that.

“Sky Slash!”

-Kuaaaaaaagkh!

An overwhelming mana erupted from his sword.

Single strike. No matter that restrictions on restrictions were piled on Surtr, his

defences should still have been beyond your normal imagination, but he was desummoned in a single strike.

But that wasn't the most important thing.

"I just read that in a manga..."

To save my own cards I just bullshat something I'd read in a manga for him, but he actually used it.

And I only taught him this yesterday!

Even the previous cohort kids took a year to use it and this kid uses it immediately! That skill is a cute weak girl's signature skill!(1)

Kurrgh! Now what am I meant to do?

Although I have the option of letting them graduate early, I need to train them for at least a year. Otherwise it's marked down as a result of the kids' skills and not the instructor's teaching.

In that case, let alone my comfy job, I can say goodbye to my bonuses as well.

The dwarf uncles were nagging me when I was going to pay up my overdue fees as well, if my bonuses go flying then I become a debtor.

"The kids look lively."

As I seriously wondered whether I did have to show them my trump cards, I heard a familiar voice, yet one I didn't want to be familiar with from behind my back.

"Sia, weren't you like that at their age?"

"Fufufu. It was quite fun then. I don't know how the others are doing right now."

Bull to the shit. Although they were like cats and dogs normally, when it mattered they were oddly well coordinated.

They probably kept in touch with each other for 'just in case' scenarios.

And should they get together, they could probably bury me six feet under.

Heck even I'd go ahead and secretly bury an instructor like me.

It's only because I'm an instructor. Why else would I be petty enough to make them fight over food.

"Anyways, why are you here."

"Ah, really. A beauty's come in person to see you, how col... Ah, wait a minute please. Put that away."

The moment she started blathering on unnecessarily, I pulled out a club and she took a horrified step back.

"Not master but instructor."

"No diffe... Yes yes. Instructor. So please put that away first!"

There's only one reason why she's so horrified seeing the wooden bat.

She was hit a lot by this.

For the record, schoolchildren need to grow up with beatings. Then they listen.

And if you're talking about punishment, of course the wooden bat is the best!

After my first temporary instructor assignment, I took precisely two disciples the first time I became a permanent instructor, but I felt something missing then.

That was punishment!

Punishment is truly difficult to manage.

If you don't punish disobedient children then they don't listen, if it's too harsh and they get injured, then that's a problem in training.

Because of this, even while I was working in the imperial palace I diligently worked on the Bat Project, and in conjunction with the connections I made in the palace and my preexisting non-human connections I was able to inscribe all sorts of magic and arts into a branch of the World Tree.

The result was this wooden bat! It looks nothing like a baseball bat but it's called a bat!

If you were to speak of this bat, with 24 spells as a base, split between 10 curses and 14 blessings, and another 12 ancient charms and incantations on top, resulting in no injuries no matter how much you were hit by this, and also causing massive pain even with a weak strike, I managed to craft a punishment tool that can be called the textbook of punishment tools.

This effectiveness came to present themselves from the second batch of disciples, and after that my disciples became very, very obedient little children!

As I fidgeted with the bat while reminiscing on happy memories, Sia took another step backwards.

"I thought you no longer felt pain from this anymore?"

"Nope. Not at all. It still hurts. Getting used to it, and not feeling pain from it are two different things entirely, instructor."

Wow, it's been a long time since I've seen her face this rigid.

"Either way. I'll ask this again. Why are you here?"

"Aww, of course it's because... Yes, I'll talk, I'll talk, please put it away! It's the trainee screening, same as ever. I'm here to test and watch for their potential dangers."

"You didn't need to come in person."

"Our instructor really does need to reevaluate himself. Do you seriously not know just how highly the higher-ups rate the trainees you teach?"

"If they rated them that highly I'd like them to raise my wages that highly as well."

"...Considering how much you take from the organization to begin with."

She shakes her head but insufficient is insufficient.

Even if I empty out the pockets I made during my jobs, I still don't have enough for a satisfying retired life.

Since I keep researching things for the future, I'm always leaking an unimaginable sum of money.

“Are you going to start right away?”

“Yes. Well, I’m busy too.”

Sia shrugged her shoulders and said to me with a bright smile.

“And so, let me borrow my juniors for a bit.”

#5. Their story: the story of the spies in the evil organization. (1)

“Then No.17.”

“Yes.”

Slightly different from the normal routine, where I could lose my life at any time.

And the beautiful woman in charge of that daily routine is none other than one of the core departments of the organization, the Intelligence Agency’s vice-director.

“I shall begin the questioning.”

Just what will happen if it’s discovered that I’m the daughter of the Nermia family?

I could become a tool for the organization using brainwashing magic, a hostage or even outright executed as an example.

And so. Using everything I have, I need to pass this test.

The moment I made my resolve, the gentle smile immediately turned to a frigid gaze, and a truly unexpected question drove in.

“Is your preference an older man, or younger?”

“Eh?”

My mind blanked out for a moment but I immediately snapped to attention. Just what on earth would an evil organization need to ask this question for?

Wait, this question is designed to make the opponent let their guard down!

They’d probably get the information out of me while I hesitate and waffle. In that case

I should answer normally.

“I prefer older men.”

Chill.

I felt bloodthirst all of a sudden. Was it something I said?

But, younger than fourteen is a literal child. Although my age is one where it wouldn't be odd for me to be treated as a child, but even younger than that, that's an age where you have to wonder if they even understand the concept of dating.

“Really now. Minus marks.”

“Wait! On what grounds?!”

She's writing something down with a serious expression. Is this also to bait us?!

“Very well. I shall ask you additional questions on the previous. How much older do you feel is acceptable to you?”

But even as she moved onto the next question her eyes were still dead serious.

“If it's older... Around five years or so?”

That should be alright. If it's too much then it's weird. She nodded as if my answer this time was satisfactory, and undid my minus marks.

It's surely just my imagination that I thought I heard “thank goodness I don't have to kill you,” in a small voice right? Right?

“Now then, tell me why.”

“Mmm... To be honest, younger than me at my age is too young, and too old is a bit awkward, or a poor match...”

Even as I wonder why I'm being asked these questions I keep answering.

I have no idea what's in her mind.

As expected of the Empire's worst evil organization, is it still too difficult to handle

with my skills!

“Is that so. Very good. Excellent.”

As I diligently explained my preferences for slightly older men, the woman in front of me nodded with a very satisfied expression.

To be honest, I seriously wondered whether I’d been overthinking this way too much and she actually was just questioning me on my preferences.

“And, it’s a bit meh if you’re talking about middle-aged men.”

“And what’s wrong with middle-aged men?”

Why the heck am I feeling bloodthirst from this?! What the heck did I do wrong this time?!

It’s scary! Too scary!

“Eh? Th, that, the age difference...”

What was it? Where did I go wrong?

This is normal, isn’t it?

Liking middle aged men at the age of fourteen is something only for abnormal kids with a father complex or something, right?

“The passion of twenties’ is bravado. That is, men’s bravado to risk their lives for even a slightly cuter girl. They are creatures that believe that women will flock to them if they show off looking a little bit better. Compared to that, middle age is different. They have seen the world and experienced many things and trained themselves. Of course, there are trash that have never moved on and are still lusting after women, but will aged. Yes, that’s a good expression. Aged. You don’t called a cheap wine aged simply because you leave it alone for a long time. Fine wine, and its process of being made better. That is aging.”

This woman, she’s monologuing and answering herself.

As if she liked the aging metaphor, her nodding head and satisfied expression made me unable to believe that this woman was the supposed genius who took the seat of

the vice-director of the Intelligence Agency, one of the cornerstones of the organization, at such a young age.

“A handsome middle-aged man’s wrinkles are like the rings of a tree that leaves marks on the body with age, and a handsome middle-aged man’s white hairs, are a sign of years of overcoming difficulties and struggles.”

At her words which were veering more to simple praising of middle-aged men, I can’t tell whether this is simply her personal preference or an actual ruse to let my guard down.

My instinct is screaming it’s the former, while my head is saying it’s the latter.

“Now that you put it like that, I think middle-aged men have their own charms.”

An affirmative response that I tossed out without thinking from my complicated head. But it was a poor choice.

“Do you want to die?”

“Eh?”

“Is this a declaration of war? Just what are you implying by saying that you are feeling the charm of middle age right to my face?”

“Eh? That’s not... I was just saying that middle aged men have their own charms after listening to vice-director...”

“Yes, that goes without saying. But, you should not approach feeling those charms.”

What does she want from me?!

And even to not approach even if I feel the charms of middle aged men, all my training is done internally so the only one around me is... Eh...? Surely?

“By any chance, do you like the instructor?”

At that moment, I said the hypothesis that struck my head hard.

“Yes. I do?”

She answered immediately?!

This woman, she's serious! Then does that mean that it wasn't just my imagination that she said she'd kill me?! Then!

"On the gods and my soul, even if I ever aim for middle-aged men, the person of my affections will never be the instructor."

"Then sign here."

As I finished speaking the words that instinctively came out of my mouth to preserve my life, she pushed something over as if she was waiting for it.

It's a piece of paper, but it's shining. Plus in the same colour of the stone plate that the instructor used to scam the archdevil... That's can't be a-

"A Geass Roll?"

"Didn't you say you could swear by the gods?"

Her smiling face as she pushed the contract in front of me, seemed like death awaited me if I didn't.

Seriously, although I respect him as a magician, but as a romance target, the instructor is an out.

"Where do I sign?"

The moment I signed with a smile marked the end of my questioning.

Mm. This organization. Even if the Empire doesn't take a crack at it it'll probably fall soon enough.

Chapter 12

What Is This. Scary. (5)

#7 Their story: the story of the spies in the evil organization. (2)

Gulp.

The saliva that's gathered in my throat goes down automatically.

At present I actually am a spy. I can't get caught here, but the opponent is the woman who hit me with that weird object last time.

"It's been a while, mister No.1."

She's smiling brightly, but my heart's shrinking back on itself. She made that exact same smile when she hit me last time...

"Th, th Senior, you don't have to be polite with me..."

"Ah, that's alright. Because this is official work. Master said that if I speak with you too easily like a casual setting then it isn't work."

Ahh, does that mean she's going to beat me up in an official setting!

If she'd hit me with that stick, let alone my own identity I'm almost certain I'd spill the beans on all the ducal family's secrets as well.

Feeling pleasure even though it hurts! It was the devil's weapon that made me ashamed of myself.

"Now then, it's shorter for men so I'll end it quickly."

"Ye, yes!"

When I thought about it at a later date I wondered why it was shorter for men but at the time I didn't have the leisure to care about that.

"Are you a spy?"

"No, ma'am!"

"Alright. We're done."

...Wut?

This organization, how is it still running?

#7 Their story: the story of the actual future member of the evil organization.

"No.1000?"

"Yes."

"I shall begin the questioning now. Is your preference for older, or younger men?"

Preference? What's that?

"What you like."

Mmm... What I like. Then of course.

"Meat?"

"Preferences in people."

"Someone who cooks good food?"

"Hmm... This is a first..."

The pretty big sis is frowning.

Did I do something wrong?

"Someone who cooks good food... Then what about the instructor?"

The instructor?

The instructor makes delicious food.

The desert fox steak he made for us before in training was really tasty.

The instructor is amazing. There's nothing he can't cook.

Animals, fish, bugs, tree bark.

The moment he said there's nothing in this world you can't eat I realised I still lacked comprehension of the world.

"The instructor is really good at cooking!"

"...This is quite the conundrum..."

After we talked a bit the pretty big sis scowled harshly and walked out.

Mm... did I do something wrong?

#8 Their story: A certain organization's evaluation

No.1: Ordinary overall.

No.17: Great belief in the organization. A trustworthy asset

No.1000: Cannot tell her thoughts at all. Caution advised.

The trainee evaluation ended.

It was unexpected that No.1000 had a cautionary label, but since words don't really get through to her something like that could happen or so I thought.

Anyways, that's a relief.

That girl Sia, considering her own history I half wondered whether she would fail them or not.

Luckily they all passed. If there were any spies among my disciples then there would be a massive red line across my CV, that has to be avoided at all costs.

Therefore.

Let's teach them some ideals.

Well, I'm not making them a socialist or any other weird doctrines.

If your colours are too bright then you stand out. That's the law of nature. It's a law of

nature that weak animals have camouflage.

If my disciples had a queer ideology, and they said I was their teacher?

I would also be seen as someone with dangerous ideals.

Therefore, my disciples need to be a lovely shade of grey.

So that they don't stand out to those without talent, and so those with talent will fight over them.

Normally the more they're wanted from both sides, their price goes up, and as their teacher a little something finds its way into my back pocket to put in a good word.

But unlike the training done so far which is half-automatic by this point, it is very hard to plant ideas into people.

Ideals are a total of everything that they have been exposed to in the world.

Therefore changing that is as much of a shock as saying their entire life is a lie.

In that case, how would I give these kids that shock?

"This time is real combat."

Naturally, by beating them.

I can't remember who said it, but someone did. That there's nothing easier than persuading someone that's mentally defenseless.

There's a reason why they do their best in torturing and mind breaking captives, after all.

And someone else said this.

A healthy mind in a healthy body! Therefore, if the body is invincible, so is the mind!

First up is our No.1.

Hm. He'll make a good example.

His pretensions of kindness are oddly annoying. Of course there was that time where he tied up No.17, but compared to the others he's oddly morally uptight.

Since No.17 already made a contract with an archdevil she's going to go down in history as an archvillain, and No.1000 is easier to persuade by giving her tasty food.

This is all for No.1's sake.

No villain dies quicker than one that holds onto their morals.

"Yes, sir."

He takes up a stance with his sword, eyes peeled open.

Now, time for a choice.

1. Tackle
2. Sand-Attack
3. Hit
4. Run

Very well, this time's choice is!

"Huwaah?"

The choice is number 2 sand attack! It was super effective! No.1's accuracy harshly fell!

"What the hell is, huuuak?!"

And immediately following up with a number 3, hit combo. Since this was using the bat, as a passive he also has the pain increase and damage reduction attached!

The magic weapon where no matter how much you're hit your HP will never drop!

"This cheap way of uugh..."

He tried to dodge even as groans came out of his mouth instead of words, but even if I look like this I've spent most of my life making a living with my sword.

As someone who taught someone to hack away with a sword even in my past life, you have mister at-least-50-years-of-experience Naruan.

"Cheap, you say. I said this was real combat, you know?"

My mouth moves but my hand never stops.

Normally when the villain explains their story or their technique it's a matter of human nature that the hero uses that time to restore their stamina, prepare magic and the moment the villain finishes "thanks for the story! This is my gratitude!" and firing off their finisher.

"Have you never heard this? According to the mercenaries' manual, if your forces are ten times the enemy, surround them and make them surrender. If five times, attack, two times, split the enemy with strategy, if even fight head on, and if your forces are less then avoid fighting and bait them. And if the situation is not ideal to fight your enemy, pull out and retreat immediately. If a weak force does not avoid the enemy and resist they become the enemy's captives, and become deadweight to their allies."

"Th, I've heard that... are you still going to hit me while you're talking! Kuhuk!"

Yep. I'm not the one getting beat up.

"So can you not understand? You just need the advantage of numbers. And if your numbers are less, then run away. Is that fairness?"

"Th, kurk... is that battle!"

"Yes. That is battle. And there is nothing fair about fighting. In an arena where you either kill or are killed, there's nothing more useless than fairness.

How much you deceive the enemy, make them fall in despair, winning even with cowardly methods. The person who said the words I said earlier, won in war using very bullshit and cheap methods."

"He, he was an honourable general of the Empire! No one denies that."

Oh, he's dodged and offered a rebuttal.

But honourable my ass.

All he did was go around smacking the enemy upside their heads, but there are so many morons in the Empire that can't even do that so he's called a great general.

"The one who brought an early end to the previous great war! He was fairer than anyone else. There was no way he would have meant what he said! Kuhk!"

Mm. This kid is oddly weak to stabs. I'll keep on stabbing him. Since his defense of his sides is weak I'll just keep aiming there.

But this brat, he's been completely brainwashed by that imperial princess's campaign.

Who the hell is fair?

It was all the princess's show of grabbing achievements from somewhere and deliberately reporting them under my name.

I need achievements so that less people object when she marries me?

And so I diligently gave out achievements to all my subordinates and somewhere down the line she started trumpeting the line I was some harbinger of fairness or something.

Heck, I just randomly bullshat something from Sun Tzu's Art of War and Wu Qi's Wuzi and she went and put them in the Empire's officer training manual.

Thank goodness I ran away early.

I bailed out two months ahead of schedule, if I'd followed the original plan I would've certainly been caught.

Thankfully the organization understood me somewhat.

To be honest, more than understanding, the great war just turned everything into a giant clusterfuck.

"Kuhuk!"

Thump, thump, thump!

“Kahuk!”

He’s doing his best to block but since I keep aiming for his sides he keeps focusing on them.

In that case a shot on the shoulders, once on the thigh, oh my his legs are shaking? Another hit to encourage him to do his best.

“Fair? Even the heroes who always scream about a minority being persecuted by an evil noble, when a demon king comes out they take ten, hundreds, thousands of heroes to subjugate a single demon king. And yet they still harp on about fairness. But that is called justification. They are absolute good, the enemy is absolute evil. Therefore even if they care absolutely not about their means and methods, they are still fair.”

I hit the kid who’s about to fall unconscious and wake him up again. Since he’s waking up it means he’s still lively.

“Also, taking hostages is cowardly? When someone breaks the Empire’s military laws, the first thing they do round up the criminal’s close friends or family. While there is the intention of preventing them from helping out the criminal, in reality they’re hostages. When the criminal gets away, the very first thing they do is give them sound amplification magic tools and have them persuade the crim.”

Oh, for the record this was used in the great war as well. Usually by me.

When I captured an enemy village as prisoners and broadcast their fear live, the enemy troops’ morale took a nosedive.

Mm. Well, thanks to that we caught a lot of live prisoners, and my, it only seems like yesterday I was giggling with the imperial princess as we listened to them yell do you bleed and cry you so-called great general of the Empire, are you lot even human, not even devils would do this! And so on and so forth.

That was quite fun.

“Why, why are you explaining all the way there! I was just blaming you for throwing sand in my face!”

“Same with sand. I said this was real combat, not a training spar. If you wanted a fair

fight like you're thinking of then you should have gone to a knight order, not the organization. But do you really think the knights are any different?"

Honourable knights, fair knights!

Very well. When hero stories started to die down, those kinds of knight tales started to rise in popularity as well.

But, reality is different.

"Even knight orders are already decided by connections. If your father is a knight captain, even if your skills are lacking then you'll end up in the knight order eventually. On the contrary, even if you have skill, if you're a commoner it's hard to even become a squire."

Well sure, that's what I say. But those famed knight houses as a given, almost all houses famous for martial arts would rather teach their kids how to swing a sword instead of common sense. They don't call them muscle brains for nothing.

The difference between commoners who find it hard to put food on the table and the ones whose sword is their life is overwhelming.

But that in itself isn't fair either.

To begin with the starting points are unequal, the fact that other things beyond that are even more unfair is life's logic.

And to realize that logic,

"S, stop!"

You need to beat them. It's alright, it's alright. If you get hit by this your body gets better. Although your legs are shaking and it hurts like you're going to die, but when you wake up you can do it feeling nice and refreshed.

Moreover, if it's to the point where it's not okay, then you'd probably faint first. And so, I'm hitting him.

And the biggest reason is.

“To begin with, I can’t use magic. For the majority of my life I’ve swung a sword, but for this simple reason I am pushed back by simple sword ki users.”

Whether it’s natural strength, superior technique, if your magic power is stronger than you win. Simple as that.

Between swordmasters, it’s more a matter of who has the bigger and sharper sword aura, or even output what they call an aurora better.

Of course, experience and skill is important. But if you have a fuckoff big aura blade you can chew up anyone experience and skill and all. In a straight fight, that is.

“And so, if I’m going to beat you kids who can use sword ki, then it’s natural I prevent you from using it.”

“Th, that is!”

Oh, his mouth can still move. I shall name you Sandbag the Second.

For the record, the First was one of your seniors from a previous cohort. Since he was a demihuman famous for their sturdiness he got beat up a lot.

“Even in the martial houses that spout on about training with the sword prioritize sword ki. They need to be able to use sword ki, and further on be able to use sword auras to be treated better, and because of that swordsmanship alone doesn’t cut it.”

Of course, this is bullshit as well.

They’re not a famous family for nothing. Famous sword styles have that much value. But since I can’t tell them all that let’s just lump them all as fraudsters.

“To begin with, what is fairness. Is it good? Is it justice? In that case why the hell are you in this organization that the Empire calls evil?”

To be honest it’s not just called evil, it actually is evil. But this organization has quite the historical background. It was founded by the royal families that lost their kingdoms to the Empire, and are actually half independence fighters!

Because of that, my utopia plan which is similar to the two-faced peace strategy was

usable in the organization as well.

Hello, this kid is sleeping when people are discussing important things. It seems a touch dangerous since I can see nothing but the whites of his eyes, but a little drubbing and he gets right back up.

Since he looks like he's going to hit his limits, let's get onto the main point.

"There is no such thing as evil in this world. Only people living with their own ideals."

Chapter 13

What Is This. Scary. (6)

#9 Their story: the future hero's story.

"There is no such thing as evil in this world. Only people living with their own ideals."

The reason this stuck in my head was because the beating was lighter at the time.

Ahh, just how foolish was I.

Even when I'd been hit that much by that senior before, and even when she warned me! To think I let my guard down just because it was a wooden stick!

Moreover just what in the world is that weapon? Even if I block it with my sword the pain just crawls up my wrist and into the rest of my body.

Evasion is the only way out, but the instructor's swordsmanship is incredible. Dodging was impossible when blocking was hard enough.

In the end all I could do was get hit.

"There is no one in this world without a story. People are merely doing what they think is right, to those on the other end they have had to suffer an injustice."

I think the unjust thing here is that I'm still being beaten but if I open my mouth I feel I'll get the crap beaten out of me even more so I'll keep shut.

"Imagine someone killed a woman right in front of your eyes. What would you do then?"

"Kuk!"

How would I know. I need to survive first.

"What do you think, No.17."

Since I wasn't saying anything, he asked No.17 instead. Now that I think about it she's here as well.

Mmm. Then stop him!

"I believe I need to listen to their story."

"No.1000?"

"Hmmm... I'm not the hero or anything, ignore it and done?"

...And look at No.1000's personality. As I thought I can't rely on her.

"The most logical thing is to listen to them like No.17 said. However humans naturally remember things to their own convenience. They could frame the woman as an enemy spy, or an evil demon in disguise. What is certain, is that it will be very difficult for you lot to identify the truth."

No, what's certain is that I'm still whimpering getting beaten.

That weapon is still hitting me even now!

Now I'm almost crawling on the ground and no one's looking my way. Ahh, damn it!

"Unless you are gods, you cannot always choose the correct path. In that case, it's best to not get involved to begin with. If someone tries to start a great revolution, just watch. A revolution is also someone else's rebellion. Even this empire that's the greatest in the continent, began with a revolution caused by an ordinary civilian, who went on to become the first emperor. But when he founded the empire there were a series of three different plots."

Well, so what?

Stop hitting me!

"All three of those plots were planned by the empire's founding families. Although they were recorded as rebels later, at the beginning they were heroes fighting for the same cause as the emperor. But in the power struggles that followed they lost to the emperor and became rebels. Power is always the victor's version of history. In that case, the method to live long and prosper is to be neither a winner or a loser."

"The method to live long and prosper?"

“Indeed. Most of the reasons people come to this organization are all pretty similar. Especially since the great war.”

Uh nope? My brothers sent me because I was in the way of their squabbles?

And because of my damn father who sees this as perfectly normal so I can't even go home?!

So stop hitting me!

Ah, wait, why am I not fainting? Is my body this sturdy?

No, is it just my imagination that just the pain is intensifying?

“You can't live doing only what you want. But, that's no reason to live only doing things you don't. just pray to the gods. For the resilience to be able to accept the things you can't change. The courage to change the things you can. The patience to wait to see the results of that change. And the strength to wake up in the morning to live the day.”

Ahh. Great goddess of light Sermir. Please so that I don't get beaten up. Please that damn instructor doesn't hit me. Please that I can go home and beat the crap out of my asshat brothers. And if possible, please let me eat breakfast tomorrow!

“Iii, Inst... ructor. S,stop...”

But She did not listen to my pleas. Indeed, the old philosopher's words that said you determine your own fate is truly correct!

At this moment I wanted to cry ~God is dead~ at the top of my voice, but more importantly I needed to stop that hand moving on autopilot.

“Save me...”

Uh... I'm sleepy. Mm. I think I can see my departed mother waving her hands over there?

Maybe it's because because she died giving birth to me but I don't think voice chat is supported.

But it's probably her. It's almost identical to the portrait at home.

But I can't hear her that well. Mother what are you saying?

I shouldn't cross over?

◇ ◇ ◇

"Oh, he's dead."

At No.1000's words, the hand that had been clutching my ankle quivered and dropped.

Since I was talking with the others I forgot about No.1. Sorry.

But look at these automatic hand movements. Practically macro level.

Is this what they call the stance of an experienced instructor?

"Take No.1 with you. Today's lesson is over."

"Isn't he dead?"

His eyes have completely turned so you can only see his whites, and his mouth is foaming with his tongue hanging limp, but he's not dead. Because this weapon is special.

"This is not slack enough to kill him with just that."

Out of the weapons that Black Anvil, one of the greatest dwarven clans, had ever produced, one of the weapons they would all universally rate in their top ten would be this bat.

When the Black Anvil clan were wallowing in their guilt that their weapons were being used to take lives, how happy they were when they heard of this bizarre proposition!

After it was completed and tested, for some reason or other I had to cancel the mass production plans, but considering how they gave it a seat on their list of ten greatest weapons, its completion level is no less than perfection.

Let's deduce the reason why this couldn't go into mass production being due to the

necessity of the cooperation of the elves, whom they were normally at odds with.

“He’ll probably be better after a night’s sleep.”

No.1000 nodded and dragged off No.1’s body.

She’s grabbing his legs and dragging them at waist height, and his head keeps bumping into things.

Well, he should be alright. It’s accepted fact that the dumb kids are the one with sturdy skulls.

To be honest I really don’t agree with giving instructors paperwork as well. Especially on days like this when I personally moved my own body for my disciples!

Maybe if the organization had a shortage of people that could handle paperwork, but it’s not even like they’re lacking manpower.

Doing the typical things an evil organization does, naturally there are a lot of people that get injured, and the organization uses the ones that don’t have much hope of returning to the field in the office, and those numbers are considerable.

Could you say that the social security is unexpectedly good unlike what you’d expect from an evil organization?

Normally if people become useless they’re disposed of in other evil organizations, but perhaps it’s because this one has independence fighters as its backbone, or is it to raise the loyalty of the workers?

Either way it’s irrelevant, but there are plenty of people that can handle paperwork, and I, an instructor responsible for the future of the organization has to do paperwork!

Damn office workers. You do my job then!

I was diligently stamping letters of command to do with training which didn’t really have much to do with me personally and making a tower of papers, when I felt a presence in front of my door.

“Enter.”

“Yes.”

The one who entered the room was surprisingly enough, No.1000.

What was this? Had she come charging in because of her superior survival instincts telling her of the danger of the bat already?!

If it's this girl that might actually be possible?

Khk, I'd been wearing a metal plate on my stomach just in case but if it's this girl's sword ki then it'll just make a hole.

In the past I'd made it out of expensive metal, nowadays due to a lack of funds I had to melt that down and make other things with it, and now I'm using a plain ordinary steel plate! Is my life in crisis?!

“What's the matter?”

Pretending to casually look over my documents, I slipped my left hand under my desk.

Hmph. If the plate over my stomach is thin, then what I need to do is alpha strike before my stomach gets knifed!

This is already my space, a few buttons under my desk can activate all kinds of hidden weapons and traps!

“The one who survives the longest is the winner.”

“Do you have questions about our discussion before?”

Or, to kill me to survive the longest?

“I want to be a winner.”

Pit pat.

Small footsteps that fit that small body gradually get closer to me.

What was in No.1000's face that faced me was an unexpected fervor.

To think this kid could make this kind of face for something other than eating.

I had been looking over her often enough, and it truly was out of the ordinary for her to make this sort of expression.

“Do you know what you need to survive the longest.”

“Food.”

“Correct.”

If you can't eat you die.

“Strength.”

“Correct.”

Whether it's in fighting, knowledge, factions, if you're not strong then you can be dominated and stolen from by the strong whenever they feel like it.

“Luck.”

“An essential part.”

And life is a giant shitty RNG game!

If you're lucky then everything falls into your lap even if you do nothing.

“And...”

“Can you not think of anything else?”

“Yes.”

As No.1000 nodded I slowly brought my left hand back to the top of the desk.

Hm. To think she'd request extra training.

If it was No.1 then the compensation wouldn't match the price, but No.1000 is different.

I've said this before, but this No.1000 is the number given during primary training.

When the time comes for this kid to graduate, even if she fits into just the top ten of all the cohorts I've trained so far, the fact that the bonus payout will be several times my salary was proven with the previous cohort.

“And teaching you that should be my role as an instructor.”

As an instructor, teaching my disciples is my job. But no one ever said that that job should ever be done myself?

#10 Their story: Mirua's story.

-The path to live long and prosper-

When was it. That surviving was my objective in life.

From my earliest memories, leaving with mom's hand in hand was daily life, and even fragments of bread were hard to come by and I had to loiter around here and there.

The middle of the battlefield. And as a citizen of an enemy country of the Empire every day was busy running away, and that was daily life.

Food was my life's objective.

But now that I think about it, that was just because I was struggling to survive.

Why do I want to live? Why do we struggle in order to survive? I don't understand even when I think about it.

But still. I want to know. I will survive. And to do that...

“Hm? Aren't you heading back?”

After I threw No.1 on his bed, as I hesitated to open the door to my room with my hand on the handle, No.17 saw me and tilted her head quizzically.

Even if we're all trainees there's only three of us so we're all pretty much neighbours.

“A bit later.”

No.17 made an expression that something was wrong, but she didn't seem to care much further and went into her room.

I let go of the door handle.

Yes. In order to survive. That method would be the best.

I turned my footsteps back around, past the training grounds to where the instructor lived and knocked on the door to his quarters, but there was no one there.

Maybe, he's still working...

"Come in."

Outside the instructor's office.

I put down the hand that had been about to knock on the door. I hadn't even knocked yet but had he already realised I was here.

"Yes."

Is he working? He's writing something on paper and not even looking my way.

"What's the matter?"

"The one who survives the longest is the winner."

"Do you have questions about our discussion before?"

The instructor said coolly.

But, after listening to this today, there was something I realised.

"I want to be a winner."

I want to be a winner. I want to live long and prosper. I don't want to die. The majority of life in my memories were in death's shadow.

I was always so hungry I felt like I'd die.

I was always so scared I felt like I'd die.

It always hurt so much I felt like I'd die.

Many, many times I thought that it'd be easier for me to give up and die, but I don't

know why but death was even scarier.

And so I always ran away from the thing called death.

Yes, I had always been running.

I ran away from the adults that looked at me dangerously.

I ran away when I that heard the Empire's battlemages, the death gods of the battlefield were approaching.

Even when I fought among the orphans for something to eat I would run away if I realised I was outmatched.

Like that, always, I would run away.

Grit.

I bit down on my lips. The iron taste of blood filled my lips.

I don't want to have to run away any more.

One step, another, I walk closer to the instructor.

"Do you know what you need to survive the longest."

Finally, the instructor looked at me and said with a slight smile.

What you need to survive? Of course I know that.

"Food."

If you are hungry then you have no strength. Every step feels like agony. Sometimes the world will turn white in front of your eyes. Especially when you can't drink any water as well, then it's truly hell.

"Correct."

See. Even the instructor acknowledges it.

"Strength."

If you are not strong then things are taken from you. The feelings of having food you fought so hard for being stolen from you is something only those who have experienced it would know. And in order to reclaim it you need to be strong. If you are not strong, you get taken from and die.

“Correct.”

See. Even the instructor acknowledges it.

“Luck.”

If you're unlucky then you can be hit by a stray spell. If you are lucky then you can survive even in under magic artillery fire. Life and death is always separated by the thickness of a single sheet of paper. And that single sheet of paper is luck.

“An essential part.”

See. Even the instructor acknowledges it.

“And...”

I can't think of any more. There's definitely more. I know what it is. But I just don't have a way to explain it.

“Can you not think of anything else?”

“Yes.”

In that case that is not something that I know. Just something that I feel. To be precise, something that I don't know.

And that's why I came to the instructor. And as if he was pleased, he said.

“And teaching you that should be my job.”

After he said that, the instructor took me somewhere.

In these last few months I thought that I'd seen everything this facility had to offer, but we opened an old door I thought was a storage shed and went down a flight of stairs,

a small cave appeared.

“I thought you would need this after a bit more time, but seeing your desires I’ll open it up early.”

“Is what I want inside here?”

“Yes. There is. But, only if you can survive.”

If I can survive?

That means...

“I could die in here...”

“Yes, you could die. But like I’ve said earlier, the one that survives is the winner. Meaning that death awaits the defeated. Life and death is always together. Survive. And prove it.”

With that, the instructor left without any more words.

There was no command for me to turn back either. He didn’t even ask me for my opinion. He believed in me, and led me here.

“Life and death is always together.”

Muttering those words I opened the door.

Fik!

“Uht?!”

I barely dodged something that grazed my cheek.

The instructor was always right.

If I listened to the instructor, everything went well. Although he said some difficult things from time to time, when we didn’t understand, he made us understand with actions.

And maybe this time as well, if I can get through this dangerous place like the instructor said, I could attain my goals.

So I understand you, instructor. I understand you, instructor...

But an arrow flying towards my head the moment I open the door is too much... Sob.

Chapter 14

What Is This. Scary. (7)

The Twelve Labours.

Heracles got 12 labours, didn't he? With that in mind I constructed a training cave with twelve rooms. If you had to ask why a cave it's because it felt like they would have done this in a wuxia novel! Was the kind of feeling I had in mind when I made this training area.

Of course, the contents aren't crudely made either.

I made this carefully with my experiences from both my past and present lives.

Starting from the first room of arrows, the first five rooms were designed to recreate situations that one could encounter on the battlefield, and the next five rooms are made to trial the occupants by numbing the senses.

I tested it myself, and the ninth room where all five senses are nullified should be particularly difficult.

Since you can't feel anything in a room where you can't see anything, it feels like you've died and become a ghost.

Since I made it so that even I, who can't even be affected by curse magic, let alone regular illusions can be affected by it, so it's not the sort of thing that you can push through with magic power alone.

Because knowing that the kids would block it with magic, I used all sorts of paralysis and hallucinating poisons without holding back!

Of course since every level is hard mode the kids'll get tired as well.

And their motivation'll drop too.

And because of that, to show them the face of a well-respected instructor, the eleventh room is a room of rest in preparation for the twelfth.

Why? Because the twelfth room is seriously dangerous.

To be honest, I didn't make that room.

The twelfth room is the handiwork of my previous cohorts of graduates. My initial heartwarming intentions of 'take care of your future juniors!' that I initiated from my very first cohort was twisted by my damn disciples, becoming a room with feelings of 'why don't you try getting f***ed over!' and other assorted malice.

Because of this, even when they swear and curse as they fall to it, the vicious cycle never stops.

Well, that was the second generation. After the third generation, that is now, they cleared away all of the routes they used to clear it, installing new traps and other modifications.

Especially the previous cohort, two of them actually came back to add a summoning circle with their first paycheck.

These lunatics.

Among the trainees, no, even if you include the training regimes of the soldiers or the knights, let alone the organization, the Empire, no, the entire continent, the only place you can face off against a devil is here!

And because of that I'd planned to start this sometime mid-next year at the earliest...

But since No.1000 wants to get stronger, I opened it for her specially so she could.

Well, it's not like I did it just because I was lazy.

...Really!

Ah, that reminds me. Once tomorrow comes I should get the other two in here as well.

Good things are meant to be shared, right?

Their peer is suffering, I can't just leave the other two alone.

Hm... Good. It's actually really good?

At the very least it'll take a year minimum for them to clear it, and I won't have the risk of having all my secrets cleared out until then.

This is perfect?!

Even the previous cohort which was said to be the strongest in the organization's history took nearly a year to beat it, and their numbers were more than double the current cohort but it still took them that long.

There's no way they can overcome the trials that I made with just three people!
Uwahahahahaha! I am the guardian of my own stock! Come, brats! I shall show you the hell that is royalty fees!

...There was a time where I was happy like that too. Damn it!

#11 Their story: The secret future hero's vitality.

The day after I screamed in pain a new trial awaited us.

"This place?"

I was beat up that much, I was suffering that much but my body was perfectly fine.

No, beyond fine, when I woke up I actually felt refreshed.

Because of that I couldn't even skip out on training and had to come with everyone else.

And the new training ground we arrived at was an old shed I didn't know even existed, and beyond the suspicious-looking old door was a cave which screamed bad tidings no matter how you looked at it.

"That reminds me, you said you came here on your own yesterday."

When No.17 asked No.1000 that No.1000 nodded her small head affirmatively.

“What kind of place is it?”

No.1000’s head tilted a bit. Then she seemed to struggle with her thoughts for a bit before she smiled brightly and said.

“No.1, try opening the door.”

“Eh? The door?”

As No.1000 nodded I sighed and followed No.1000’s instructions and pushed op...

Fik!

“Kuk!”

What the hell! A surprise attack from the very beginning!

No, before that!

“Oi, No.1000. You knew about this, didn’t you?!”

“Yep. It’s this kind of place.”

What the hell are you saying with a smugly proud look! One of your peers nearly got killed by an arrow! After listening to you, too!

“Hey, wait, that’s uncalled for! Why the hell did you make me open it? No.17 asked was the one that asked, did I ask you anything?”

“...Because you’re a man?”

Damn it! Because I’m a man she says!

What kind of age is this! It’s an age where one of strongest existences of the sword, the Sword Star is a woman!

Ah, but I can’t really say anything back.

Going and outright making a woman lead from the front is something my pride as a duke’s son and a man won’t let me swallow...

“Kuk... alright. I’ll lead. But still, even if it’s this place, there’s going to be plenty of dangerous sections and whatnot.”

Pride didn’t feed me, rather it had taken away many of my meals, but I still had my pride. I needed to abandon it as quickly as possible it’s not working out very well.

“Yep. Once you take a step forward after opening the door.”

Hm? One step. Meaning the one step I’m taking now?

“Silent arrows are fired from underneath.”

Tak.

“This crazy?!”

The moment my foot hit the ground I immediately fell backwards and dodged the arrows.

I was seriously about to die from that!

“Why the hell is there no sound when arrows are being fired?! And you should speak up faster! I nearly died back theaaereee?!”

I immediately ducked my head to dodge No.1000’s sword flying towards my face. This crazy bitch!

Are you just outright gunning to kill me now! What did I do wrong! Damn it was it food? Are you eliminating the competition now!

Tang! Tang! Tang!

But after I heard something colliding against her sword, something dropped onto my head.

Hm. This. Is an arrow. If I’d stayed like that I’d have a hole in my head.

But silent again?

It's only one step in from the entrance.

But isn't silence way overdoing it from the beginning? Surely the first arrow when I opened the door can't be the only arrow that makes noise right?

"Oi, No.1000 answer me. Just how far did you get in last night."

"Around... ten metres?"

Ah, this crazy.

Just what does the instructor do for a living to make all this.

No, was it made by the organization? Surely, right? Even if it's the instructor, as long as he was human he wouldn't have made it this difficult from the very beginning, right?

And this is why evil organizations should never exist! Even if it was a degraded version, how the hell is he expecting us to pass this when girl who could make a joke out of the Empire-style magic bombardment was stopped at just ten metres?!

...was what I had thought.

"Only three doors left..."

Three months later, only three doors had yet to be cleared. Damn it. It actually is possible.

Why is it doable.

In the darkness where I couldn't see an inch in front of me, I leaned against the wall and thought about the time that had passed so far, but I still didn't get it.

We spent nearly a month in the first room of arrows. The room that was almost a hundred metres long felt like hell.

Arrows came from everywhere. Let alone from the front we also had arrows aimed at us from above our heads, under our feet, even diagonally aimed arrows, it felt like we'd been hit everywhere at least once except for the vitals.

No, it probably wasn't just our feelings.

The more amazing thing is that even if we're hit by the arrows they don't pierce through us.

When you think about how the arrows are traveling at speeds that even No.1000 found it hard to dodge you'd think they'd pierce clean through our bodies, but once we got hit only the very short arrowhead part stuck into our skin as if by pinpoint precision, and once we dug the arrows out all that happened was that we bled for a bit.

Having said that we couldn't look down on them because each and every arrow was coated with various poisons.

That was truly fearful, and it also let us understand exactly who was the creator of this cave.

Even in the primary training facilities I was trained like you'd expect from an evil organization, but this evil could only be from that devil of an instructor.

As to what that meant, the poisons used were truly diverse.

If they were just your common paralysis and other dangerous poisons then I wouldn't even bother bringing them up.

But... poisons that induced vomiting, diarrhoea!

This isn't the work of a human! Not even devils would do such a thing. This was a trap full of malice designed by that devil, no worse than a devil instructor!

If she shut her mouth and I saw her not here but on the outside, No.17 would be a unique beauty, and even No.1000 would pass on the cute side as long as she kept her mouth closed, but even so.

No matter how beautiful the woman, when she's chucking up or squatting while shivering in the corner, those thoughts are a bit, no, completely shattered!

No even before that I'm in danger too! And in a lot of it! At least No.17 summons that big archdevil and deal with matters like that, but in my case all that I can do is hone

my nerves to the limits and retreat!

I honestly nearly pissed my pants. To think a son of a duke would piss his pants!

To the point where we even thought it would have been better if the poisons were the quick, painless and lethal ones!

If it wasn't for the fact that the traps didn't activate when we retreated, I would honestly have reported the instructor to the Empire as the incarnate of the evil god that was only spoken of in legends.

And unlike me and No.17 who was practically dying from poison, No.1000 was immune to practically all the poisons.

And did that bring complacency.

Just before the door leading to the second door, No.1000 was nicked by an arrow before her face suddenly turned pale and she started to vomit.

As No.17 looked on her regurgitated breakfast with an aggrieved expression, No.17 and I felt keenly aware of the risk to our lives, no, the fear that we could possibly lose something we desperately had to protect as humans.

To think there was a poison that even worked on that No.1000, so potent that it could break, no, obliterate all our dignity as humans.

I want to run away! But that devil of an instructor will almost certainly refuse to let us.

In that case there is only one thing we can do. Surpass your own limits and break through the gate.

As a result, we could surpass our limits.

At the last when almost a hundred arrows all came flying at us at the same time it made us wonder "is this the end?"

To make matters worse up till now where all the arrows had been silent, in addition to audible arrows being fired at us from our surroundings there were also silent arrows being shot at us from our blind spots.

Had we gotten used to the silent arrows by then, when we heard the sound of arrows flying at us all our attentions were taken up by those and we were nearly done in by the silent ones.

The moment we noticed the silent arrows, it felt like time had stopped, and I felt instinctively with all the mana in the surroundings.

And I realised. This... was showing off your money!

What kind of ridiculous mana density that we could feel in this room.

Countless magic stones were being used in the apparatus used to fire arrows at us.

The reason why the arrows were silent, and the reason why the speed of the arrows were regulated so they would stab into us but not kill us, the moment we felt the mana in that space, we realised that that was a ridiculous space where countless magic stones were being used.

And that was just the first trial!

What kind of hell is this place!

But when we passed through the second and third trials, the difficulty of the trials were lower than we thought.

Although the difficulty compared to the first gate, the room of arrows was higher, the biggest difficulty of the first room were the poisons that stripped away your dignity as human beings, after that those poisons weren't used and it actually became possible to just charge through them.

And so it took us less than a month to pass through the trial of steel, the trial of earth, the trial of traps and the trial of magic.

Compared to the month we spent clearing the trial of arrows, we cleared the other trials at extremely fast speeds.

The last door, the trial of magic in particular was one where we almost didn't see the point of including when we considered the previous magic bombardments we were

subjected to.

But we realized the moment we entered the sixth trial.
As we thought. It was that instructor, to think we were careless!

“I can’t condense mana that well.”

No.17 said beside me with an extremely irritated voice and the sound of something grinding.

A stream of blood was trickling down her oddly noticeable lips.

Since the first door, she’d developed a habit of biting her lip whenever she was stressed out.

“And... I can’t see.”

No.1000 was looking around almost excessively.

Up till now we had been relying on her instinct a lot to get us through the trials.

The sixth sense over the other five. The fact that she who could sense out danger by pure instinct was looking around meant that there was something that was triggering her sixth sense.

But all I could see was a space filled with a fog where I could just see the girls in front of me.

With my technique I acquired in the first trial I used my mana to scout out the surroundings but it’s being blocked out by the black fog.

That black fog was an artificial one made by magic. The magic power simply couldn’t break through the fog and was being cut off.

Worse, like No.17 said earlier, mana can barely be used in the room itself.

You need to purely use your own mana, but we’d used up significant amounts of mana in the previous trial of magic and we were all short on mana.

Although the trial of magic was easier compared to our previous experiences, it was

insanely effective in having us exhaust our mana.

It felt like we'd hit another wall.

Just how the heck did the instructor expect us to clear this room?!

"Can't we just go out and recover our mana?"

"Ah..."

"You're right?"

That day, ten minutes later.

The trial of fog was cleared.

Chapter 15

What Is This. Scary. (8)

#12 Their story: The secret of the future hero's vitality (2)

None of the trials reactivated once we cleared them.

Because of that, all we had to do was turn around back to the room that had held the trial of magic.

Actually, out of all the doors, the trial of magic's room was abundant in mana so it was pretty much the best place we could as for to recover mana.

After we recovered, it took us just 10 minutes to clear the trial of fog, and the trial after that was just a few extra traps on top of the fog from the previous trial, so we cleared that room even faster.

But the problem was from the next one.

The black fog from the eighth trial sealed off two out of our five senses, the even thicker fog completely removed our sight, and the one after that.

"...Tastes bland."

It took away our sense of taste.

Really, as long as it didn't drain us we basically camped in the trial rooms.

Thankfully unlike the time we first entered, once we cleared a room it didn't reactivate, and because of that we had no choice but to sleep in the trial rooms.

No matter that our skills had increased and it was easier to clear, but we all instinctively didn't want to have to clear the first trial again!

Because of that, with the exceptions of major injuries or exhaustion we camped in the

trial rooms, and naturally our meals were solved with simple rations.

These simple jerkies were like heaven compared to the war we fought daily for meals, but from the seventh trial onwards it deprived us of our sense of taste so that we could literally taste nothing!

And once No.1000 realised that she immediately broke through the seventh trial.

By grabbing No.17 and my hands and running where we couldn't even see anything!

"He, hey hold on!

"If a trap activates then we're all screwed!"

"There are no traps."

Like No.1000 said there were no traps.

It seemed that getting used to sensory deprivation was the purpose of these trails.

It was the same for the next trial, but in the trial proceeding that one, all five of my senses, no I couldn't feel the perception of "myself."

"Are you in front of me?"

"Say something."

"Hello?"

No matter how much I talked I couldn't hear any response so I gave up.

And I tried to get a grip of my current situation.

Whether I was sitting, standing, lying down, I couldn't feel anything.

This went way beyond simply being unable to see anything, I could feel nothing at all.

I thought I'd reached out with my hand, but since I can't see or feel my hand I couldn't even tell whether I had or not.

And I realised. Damn it. Then I can't turn back either?

Do I need to receive No.1000's help like last time? But even if I did, could I feel it?

The moment I turned back to the previous room the other senses would return so it was possible, but the problem was whether No.1000 would want to return to the room with no sense of taste.

The traps don't activate but the fog itself remains in the room

From the sixth trial onwards this fog was the difficulty of the trials. The other traps simply made them slightly harder, but in the previous trial there weren't even any traps.

Because of this there was the choice of returning to the seventh trial if we needed to, but would No.1000 make such a choice?

Wouldn't she charge forward? But what if the next trial is similar to this one? Would I be stuck struggling in the next trail and always have to rely on No.1000?

"Now that's not going to happen."

Didn't I think of No.1000 as a rival.

Looking pathetically at her back once is more than enough. I can't be that pathetic any more.

I checked my back by spreading out my mana.

Due to this fog that stuck to my body, surprisingly enough I could definitely confirm the outline of my body.

The moment I tried to use mana to sense my surroundings this black fog stuck to me and prevented it.

Just what how did that blasted instructor expect us to get out from this bloody space! I wanted to yell, but knowing the instructor there was definitely a way to escape.

How much more time passed.

Since I was in a space without any sensation whatsoever I don't even have a sense of time. Did one minute pass. Did ten. An hour.

As I circulated mana throughout my entire body, a thought came to me.

‘No sensations whatsoever, if I had to pee...’

This was a thought that would never have come to me under normal circumstances.

When I’m trying to hold it in, am I tensing my bladder, or is my brain sending signals to hold it in, I don’t know. But what was certain was.

‘At this rate it will leak.’

Big one, small one, without any sensation whatsoever, it will leak. I felt goosebumps on my skin that could feel no sensations.

The damned asshole instructor. Why does this motherfucker keep pushing the limits of human dignity.

Is that asshole actually human?

I poured out all my body’s mana. The longer I take the more dangerous it is.

Not just me, but there are two others as well. Just as I don’t want to leak and make things awkward between us, I don’t want them to leak and cause things to get awkward between us as well.

In this situation, someone has to take the lead and solve it. But how? How? Just how?

“Ah.”

A sudden exclamation came out of my mouth. A moment of clarity.

The black mana in the air right now is artificially made. And because of that, it rejects my mana.

But, since this wasn’t made by a person but tools, No.17 had been very surprised as we had cleared the trials so far.

“Each and every one is practically a pinnacle of magical engineering, even in the

Empire. They're using the surrounding magic to operate with minimal magic output."

Although she keeps saying things that make me suspicious of her identity, I didn't say anything because I was honestly wasn't one to talk, but what was certain was that No.17 had extremely high talent and knowledge about magic.

And using the craftsmanship that she so admired as the base, if this is a magic that uses the surrounding magic power you can say it is an artificial, and yet natural magic at the same time.

In that case, where did the magic power in my body come from.

All creatures are born with magic power when they are born. But as they grow up, they store the world's mana in their bodies, grow and get stronger.

Let alone humans, but all living creatures, and the same with the demons that the creators said were different.

In that case, can't this magic power be used as well?

I tried to inject my magic power into this sticky mana. Of course it rejects it. But as time goes on, the rejection became lesser.

As if it were the same as me, my magic power became gradually more similar to the surrounding magic power.

And so once I became attuned to the surrounding magic power, I became more aware of the surroundings and I became able to recognize and identify everything in the room.

"Did I lose again."

No.1000 who was blankly staring at me was almost certainly registering me.

No.17 who was emitting mana in a corner with her eyes closed seemed to be finding her own method to solve her problem

"Was this a doorless room."

Afterwards, having looked around the surroundings, I noticed a relatively large hole in a corner of the room and felt the instructor's evil intentions once again. Had there not even been the option of accidentally opening the door to get out.

-What are you doing, let's go.

As I was reflecting on what we'd done so far and what could come out in future, at some point No.17 had come up to me and tapped me on the shoulder.

Although naturally I couldn't feel anything, but the voice that echoed in my head was definitely No.17's.

"How are you speaking?"

-Just can. Try carrying your will into mana and transmitting it to me.

I struggled and tried a few times, but it didn't work out. This is quite hard. It felt like the connection was getting cut even before the intentions were being sent to her.

-What are you doing, I said let's go? If the next trial is similar we can just go back to the seventh.

Unfortunately, No.17 is right.

Although I don't know how much time has passed, I'm considerably exhausted. We need to have a look at the next trial to decide whether to rest or press on.

In the end, No.1000 jumped into the hole first, followed by No.17, then me.

Amazingly, once we jumped into the hole, the black fog, no, the lump of black mana didn't follow us. But how would you put it, the moment the surrounding left us it felt like something had drained away from our bodies.

"It doesn't look like we'll have to head back to the seventh trial."

Although the hole was small, it was plenty for us to make a temporary base.

"Should we make camp first before we enter? I want to rest a bit."

“What about just unloading our gear and going for a look? If there’s a fog then we can just shut the door and rest.”

“Well, that’s not a bad idea either.”

Ignoring No.1000 who was busy nomming on jerky, No.17 and I shared our opinions.

Hm. What would the tenth trial be. When I opened the door with curiosity.

“Hello, my juniors?”

Slam!

“Let’s rest.”

“Sounds good.”

No.17 and I slammed the door shut and trudged back to set up camp for the night.

What I had seen was a wide room and seven people each holding very distinct poses leering at us.

And among them, the one in the very centre with a beautiful smile was smaller than we remembered, but was definitely the Intelligence Agency’s vice-director.

We didn’t know what the next trial was but no matter what it was, it was definitely our hardest trial yet.

As we ate and lay down in our sleeping bags, we fell asleep thinking about what tomorrow would bring. Ah, but a prayer before I sleep.

“Our Lady Sermir who watches over us. Please, let there be a curse on the instructor.”

With the faith that if Sermir truly was a goddess that looked out for those who did good, then she would definitely fulfill that prayer.



“Quite incredible.”

What the hell was going on.

Just four months. It took them just four months to get through to the tenth trial.

The ones judged the strongest era of the organization, to me, the worst generation, the previous cohort took eight whole months to get there.

And that was horrifying enough at the time a few years back, and they chunked even that time down to a half!

And to boot the previous cohort had seven people and these kids are three!

Half the bodies, yet also half the time taken.

Logically it doesn't make any sense?

To think they passed the ninth gate like that.

That was trial made to just eliminate all the body's sensations and just randomly roll around till they dropped into the exit.

I made it thinking 'I say don't be flustered under any situation but this is a situation where you will have no choice but to panic!' but they more or less just brute-forced it.

"These kids are my best work."

"Your work is as amazing as ever."

But openly expressing it is only for the small-fry.

I can't openly show my shocked appearance in front of the one beside me casually observing the monsters named trainees with a magic tool.

"The tenth trial... we had a hard time ourselves. And doesn't this cohort have a disadvantage in numbers as well?"

"They're the ones who shortened your eight-month record to four. They could get through it easier than you might think."

The cocky little brat that smiled at my words is, like Sia, none other than my ex-disciple, and the comparatively most normal one of them all, Hawell Rein. Right now he's under Sia's wing as part of the Intelligence Agency in a very special place.

As for where that special place is...

“Naturally. Compared to an idiot who became a host and had to flee because of women, these kids are much more useful.”

“Ha, haha... I have nothing to say.”

It was a club. Out of the many minor organizations, the place with the best treatment and surprisingly, the place that got the best intelligence.

And this kid in particular is currently in the middle of an explosion of popularity in the Empire’s most prosperous club with the noble madams, saying absolutely nothing of his popularity with the young noble ladies as well!

And this riajuu-like moron is too popular that he got swept up in faction wars and is currently hiding out here.

It’s quite possible that the young ladies are shaking around his acquaintances at by their lapels looking for him at the club he used to work at, but that’s not my problem.

“And why did it have to be you...”

“The organization doesn’t feed their workers to play around. That’s what instructor always told us every time.”

“That’s true.”

And because of that I requested for any one of my ex-disciples from the previous cohort but it had to be this one.

Actually in terms of pure fighting abilities, he’s not one to go around getting a hiding either.

Even if he looks like this he was seventh overall among all the trainees from all instructors in the previous cohort, showing off his one-digit ranked skills they call single numbers, and he got multiple love calls from various fighting groups, but due to his face he was dragged off by the Intelligence Agency.

But on the contrary, that means that among those seven disciples of mine this kid is the weakest.

And he's also the furthest removed from the front lines.

Compared to him, the current cohort is growing at an immeasurable speed, if I asked him to educate his juniors as a senior, on the contrary I can only imagine HIM being the one educated instead.

"But they are strong. At the very least I needed Rood or Ragnum."

"I've grown quite a lot as well."

He seems to have flared up a bit, but how the hell does a host grow. Did he learn some techniques from some incredible big sisters like a certain number one host I read in a book once?(1)

No, wait, that protagonist. He was weak even though he learnt swordsmanship that could cut straight through steel, wasn't he? I never actually saw him win himself. The protagonist that shows off the power of connections.

I think he got stronger after he darkened up, but since this kid still hasn't gotten darker he's still going to be weak.

"You have grown. But do you really think you could beat these kids with just that?"

"To be honest it is quite fearful. No matter that they're restricted, they a representation of us just before we graduated."

The tenth trial. A type of fake clone created by a fusion of doppelgangers, a unique species of devil, and homunculi, a product of alchemy.

But since the combat skills and specialties were all extracted from the people in question themselves just before graduation, their fighting power is significant.

As for their weaknesses, could you say that they could only exert 50% of the strength of the originals, and due to their high cost they had to be reused so their internals are weak.

Because of that, when the door is opened, they are set to appear making a JoXX pose. Because XXJo poses are the pinnacle of pressure and intimidation!

"As if to prove that you are the weakest, your doppelganger is getting beat up the

most.”

“Ah, wait! I, I never got creamed like that”

And when we turned back to the magic tool his doppelganger was getting the living daylights beaten out of by No.1000.

As expected of No.1000. She bit down on the weakest first.

“But to think you would get caught by kids who haven’t even trained for a full year. You were always weak.”

“Kuk... That, that was because the others were just too monstrous! And there wasn’t that much difference between me and Maren either!”

“Yeah, sure, there might not be much difference between you and Maren who said the office was heaven and went straight behind a desk, but even a moron who couldn’t beat that Maren would still be better than a bunch of brats who haven’t even trained for a full year yet.”

“Haa... You’re still the same as ever, instructor.”

The guy who seemed to quiver for a bit before he sighed, stood up with a burning resolve in his eyes.

He’s still as weak to taunts as he was back then. Like the one who always surpasses one’s expectations when you scratch them a bit, but always the first to get beaten down like the weakest of the demon king’s Four Heavenly Kings.

“My skills, I will show them to you.”

Looking at his face filled with determination, I can only pray he doesn’t get annihilated.

Chapter 16

What Is This. Scary. (9)

#13 Their story: A certain host's story

The first conversation with the instructor in a while. But his ability to piss people off is the same as ever. But, the instructor does not know. The surprisingly fearful world of a host!

It is because he does not understand. What it means for I, the Empire's best host to have to temporarily retire from a place connected to the organization simply because of women's power struggles.

The organization had determined the faction wars that had been occurring there were dangerous, and they were right.

Because the ones fighting were none other than the young ladies of ducal houses, of which there were only three of in the entire Empire.

Those girls are fighting over me. And not even with words or power but with actual physical fisticuffs!

And the extent of their skills were such that I couldn't even look out for myself if I was caught in the middle!

To think a disciple who had undergone the training from hell would struggle to block some young ladies' faction wars!

And the truth that one who so easily restrains them every time with just two bottles of beer is a regular clubber who keeps getting rejected every time he tries, and this fact depresses me.

But I heard a lot of things in that place and I could train myself.

The women there all had quite the backstory behind them.

Having to close off their hearts in social circles with a fake smile plastered on their faces, used for arranged marriages to strengthen their families' standings, being discriminated against despite their superior skills and talents just because they were women, each and every one of them had similar wounds on their hearts and the majority of them were brought to this club by others with similar scars.

And they said they couldn't express how happy they were that they could heal their hearts in this club.

To be honest it was something that pricked quite a bit at my conscience. I wanted to go into a paramilitary force like Rood or Ragnum, but to think I'd end up in the Intelligence Agency, which the instructor said could cut you off like a lizard's tail at any moment and working as a club host! And backstabbing these kinds of women as well!

Me, the one who was nicknamed the conscience of Instructor Naruan's third cohort!

And so I did my best to respond to them sincerely, and I didn't even try to fish for information from them.

This was my conscience's last struggle against my circumstances. But on the contrary the results were a great success.

Did my honest feelings get through, the number of requests for me rose and I took the position of the club's ace within just two years, and my skills improved accordingly as I met countless women.

Sometimes I would consult with a young lady of a martial house at a bottleneck and help her with a breakthrough, and at other times I would discuss new magic theories over wine with a lady from the magic tower.

And very occasionally I would be requested for an expensive on-site callout and even acted as a swordsmanship sparring partner.

Thanks to all these there were my own skills improved as well.

I said these was all the bare foundations of training, but the primary training centers were the entirety of my basic training! Since immediately after that the difficulty shot up from easy mode to hell, no, evil god mode, and because it was the type of training

where we all struggled and crawled to not fall off the cliffs into hell, our basics were unexpectedly quite poor.

And the most important thing was, mm. That's it. Practical experience. And with my life and chastity on the line.

Our club is an adult entertainment facility but it is no brothel. It's actually quite a clean club where even young ladies who've just made their social debuts seek us out.

Plus the patrons are all either nobles, or incredibly rich!

The moment I rub them the wrong way, the survival game begins where death is the only ending.

Sia told me that either to catch the common host who dared lay his hands on their daughter(s) from the noble families, or the possibility of falling in love and blindsiding the organization as a future traitor, both outcomes meant that I was now number one in terms of likelihood to get a knife through my viscera.

Although her odd smile gave me massive cause for concern, but since that instructor-lover swore it on the instructor's name, it's probably true.

But because I was too good at my job, there actually were noble girls that tried to physically push me down, and because I had to avoid hurting their feelings and push them away at the same time it really was a period where my crisis management skills were honed and hardened.

That kind of person, namely me, wouldn't be looked down on by my juniors with just around a year of training!

I speedily pushed through the trials. Since I'd already been through them once before it was easy.

The most difficult ninth trial is easy as well if you know where the hole to the next room is. Open the door and make a straight path with ice magic, do a sliding jump onto it into the hole, done.

Although it erases all your senses, it's not like all your senses actually disappear so it's easy to pass like that.

Tak!

“Uh...”

I can see the three of them surprised at my cool appearance. Are you looking, sir instructor? Now I will show you my skills. The growth of my skills!

“Do not be alarmed. I am your...”

Senior that came to test you! Was what I wanted to say but I never got a chance to finish. Because.

“Kill it Surtr.”

The blazing heat I felt behind my back even before I finished talking and.

“Now I will definitely finish you off!”

“Die.”

And the other two diving at me. Wait, do you even know who you’re trying to kill?

Then I realised. These kids, were my juniors. And also the instructor’s disciples...

‘Please sir instructor. Sia too but please include some character building in your training regiiiiimmeeeeee!’

I screamed internally as I pulled out my sword.

◇ ◇ ◇

“They need urgent character development!”

The moment he came back after fending off the kids first strike, valiantly fighting and eventually coming out victorious this is the first thing he says.

My. What bullshit. Why?

“You shouldn’t be looking for character in an evil organization.”

“Ah...”

A well-natured evil organization, that's like saying a demon king would set up a democracy.

“But, but... an immediate attack the moment they see their senior! Isn't that way too overboard?”

“They probably attacked because they thought you were a doppelganger. Plus considering your cohort I don't think your personalities would anywhere near behind theirs.”

“That, that's just around four of us starting from Sia!”

“Out of seven, at least four. You've already passed the majority.”

Then again they immediately started counterattacking against me the moment they got used to the bat.

Thank goodness I'd prepared the metal bat early. Metal always hurts more than wood.

After I diligently beat the crap out of them they became a lot quieter and so I had no more cases of them rebelling until their graduation.

“Th, then what about putting explanations on the trial doors? When I listened to the kids talking I heard they thought that their bored workless seniors came to beat them up themselves.”

“Life is a real fight. To kindly explain what trial it is, do you think it's some hero growth dungeon from some storybook?”

Life is always a matter of practical experience. No matter how much you look up cooking recipes on the internet it's a whole different story if you actually try it.

“The difference between knowing an arrow is coming or not is significant. Same with the vanishing five senses, same with the fights against the doppelgangers. And even in the final trial's explanation, there is a significant difference between knowing everything and only a part.”

“But doesn't the final trial actually need an explanation? They might die.”

“You did it as well.”

“I didn't participate in that! What, to remove the weaknesses in that hellgate as well! We literally nearly died when we did that stage. Starting from magic attacks from the ceiling, arrows from the left, knives from the right, a giant rock from in front of us and

the floor splitting open from under us, and you only gave us two seconds between each stage!”

“For the record, your cohort added summoning circles that summons two devils from behind one’s back as well.”

“Devils?! No wait, those kind of things weren’t there when we graduated?!”

“Rood and Sia used their first pay packet to bring in the organization’s magicians to engrave them in with happy hearts.”

“They really were devils...”

Rein despaired, smacking his face into the table. Mm, to be honest I’ll agree with you there. The only trap I made myself was the ceiling, you know? But then as time went on it turned into one of those classic bullet hell games.

I dodged this so my future juniors should at least be able to survive this right? And the juniors who dodged that would think I dodged this so my future juniors should be able to dodge at least this! And as a result it became a difficulty where you’d have to use a grand spirit or some SaXXan skills to dodge those.

Well you could say that these kids’ conscience was that they actually did give them two seconds to prepare? And this boy is forgetting the key point.

“When these kids dodge them, the difficulty will only get harder.”

“Do we all have to die to bring world peace or something...”

Hoho, you won’t die. Because the Black Anvil clan that cooperates with me are the specialists in non-lethal weaponry! The Bat Series know-how I developed with them is incorporated in these traps as well! It hurts and it’s painful, but they won’t kill you. Even if finishing them off would be more merciful it won’t kill them!

The combination of Made in Black Anvil and the elven race’s opposition to needless killings is the world’s greatest! Even if you bring in the greatest engineers from a monster manga where the human PK is more OP than the monsters we will never lose out!(1)

“They won’t die.”

“Not killing them doesn’t solve everything...”

Although he says that with a really tired face it can’t be helped. My incentive is on the line! Plus all the resentment falls squarely on their seniors!

My disciples don't even develop bad practices like giving privileges for former office. Although I don't know about previous sen(pai) alpha strikes!

Because to my disciples, their seniors aren't respectable people who learned from me before them, but the worst villain that made them eat their middle fingers!

"Anyway I'm, going to head back now."

Oho, and just where is this cohort's living sacrifice going now!

"A personal order came down for you from the organization. They're saying you're in charge of training them for the time being."

"Those lunatics?"

I showed him the written orders, complete with official seal and all. Well I'm an instructor but there are times when as an active agent I need to put off my instructor duties and deal with some short-term missions.

Even when I was a new instructor, I was used as a temp hire, but my results were good enough for a permanent place.

But to think they'd use a high-spec personnel like me, what could the job possibly be?

Even if I look like this I have a 97% completion rate for my assignments. Especially it involves great magic, magic labyrinths then I'm a specialist.

Perhaps out of balance patching interests, even those beings called gods didn't give me any magic power or even the chance for buffs, but in return they gave me a body where I can't be cursed by magic or can just steamroll through traps that activate by detecting magic! To be honest why couldn't they just give me magic!

"It is a quick job but the organization trusts your skills."

Mmm. To be honest it's just that aside from Sia who brought me the orders, there's no one that I'd really want to hand over my disciples, but let's let him mistake it as a good thing.

"Isn't it just because you don't want to have to deal with these kids so you're pushing

it on me?"

Sharp kid.

"Of course not."

"But it's still scary."

"You seemed to be drubbing them quite well earlier."

To be honest he beat them with a more overwhelming difference in skill than I expected. Well they say an old eagle's better than a young crow after all. Really how cowardly considering he beat them to the point it reminded me of the old phrase even worms can wriggle.

"No, even when the doppelgangers had exhausted them, and from their point of view I'd all but ambushed them, but they didn't hesitate and tried to kill me instantly. Furthermore even when I tried explaining to them they just looked at me with expressions saying "cool story, so what." What kind of kids are they to all have personalities that could put Sia to shame."

Hm... That their personalities were trash the moment they started a war over breakfast, I knew that much.

Since the evaluations from the most normal out of my disciples is like this I'll ease it a bit from the next cohort. I'll give them breakfast at least.

"Do you hate it that much."

"Yep. They seem like the type to bury a knife in my back the moment I turn around."

That's true, but from what I see this kid's face readings he's a type to take a knife in the back someday. Most likely by a noble girl with a high yan disposition.

"In that case..."

I took out the thing I prepared in advance at the faster-than-expected trial clear speed. This lad who just flinched back in shock should know it better than anyone else. Since it beat the crap out of him for the better part of a year he shouldn't be able to forget.

"Can you say you are still not confident even if I left you this."

"If, if I have that..."

Would a lesser demon receiving orders from a heavenly demon in those old wuxia novels act like this?

Or a cultist fanatic dreaming of the revival of the evil god!

Eyes dyed in lunacy which didn't suit the most normal of my disciples. And the letters spelling greed written all over those eyes told me of his true thoughts.

"They have not experienced this yet except for No.1."

"My evaluations were wrong. To think I feared these little children."

Even his evaluation was overturned. Starting from today with Rein's burning bloodthirst, no, his passion for education I'll start the process of teaching him to take over my duties. If he has this much motivation then he should learn quickly enough.

But I didn't realize then. That this assignment would be my last in an evil organization.

#14 Their story: a certain organization's story.

Loud voices and curses went flying back and forth like some local market.

Ahh, it's so pointless. I want to see Master. I curse my fate that I need to stick with these moronic old men.

"It can't be helped. We are not in a position where we can take the Empire head-on yet."

At our secretive boss's words the entire meeting hall goes silent. Since our boss was so secretive even when all the higher-ups of the organization met up we still couldn't see his face.

To be honest it's because he pulls things like this that rumours go around the capital that the boss of this organization is actually the emperor or something.

Everyone sighed at the boss's words. To be honest, the organization's leaders' evaluation of master were a lot more special than what he himself thought.

Starting from the Utopia Plan where we managed to earn a base of operations the size of a city, and the Other Race Familiarization plan where we sacked other organizations' slave markets and freed slaves of other races, in addition to reducing the funding of other evil organizations it also had the effect of having non-human races look favourably on us.

There's a reason why there's a saying that goes 'Howling over the Empire!' among the non-humans.

He also was responsible for teaching countless... no, a small number of elite disciples including myself, well although there were a few that ran away, but our skills alone are rated in the single digits of the organization.

And even outside of that among the high class personnel with over 90% assignment success rates, he's one of the aces with a success rate over 95%. Especially, the imperial court infiltration mission during the last great war remained a legend that even I'd heard many examples of during my primary training, although I never heard specific names.

"Do you believe that the imperial princess will keep her promises?"

"She's the witch that spread her infamy across the empire!"

But there's only one reason they're giving up that Master.

Because starting from all of the organization's bases, all of their personnel was identified by the princess as well. Even the special ops forces that not even the Intelligence Agency knew about.

And a hostage exchange with them on the line. In return for staying quiet about that information, she's spouting bullshit about handing over Master in exchange.

Haa. She was famous for being a crazy bitch. She dares to try and buy Master with just that kind of information? Master isn't anywhere near as cheap an existence as that!

Even if this entire organization was sold a hundred times over it still wouldn't be enough gold, and she only offered information. Either this princess doesn't understand the market prices, or she's a corrupt merchant that doesn't even bother thinking of others' circumstances.

But likewise, the organization who knows nothing of the market is trying to sell off Master for that dirt-cheap price.

“She even sent over a Geass Roll.”

“That much can be trusted then.”

“Isn’t there the chance that it might be fake?”

“As a result of inspections by specialists of magic, sorcery, and magecraft they were all determined to be the genuine article. On the contrary it was such a simple contract there couldn’t possibly be any hidden traps inside the contents.

Listening to the noisy uncles talk on I sighed quietly again. Haa, I want to see Master... Master Master Master Master~

“But Master, this might be a bit difficult.”

A moment of silence for Master who’s going to have to work really hard again. But if it’s Master then he’ll be able to get over just this level of hardship.

In that case for the sake of our future, I should get moving as well?

Chapter 17

And So The Story Begins (1)

#1 Their story: The future hero's struggles.

Hell returned at the tenth trial.

"Uwahahaha, is this the limits of your strength! If you're my juniors you should get stronger!"

"Fufu, to think you could only amount to this much at just 50% of our power."

"To think that there's such a pathetic brat like you among the instructor's disciples, shame on you!"

"That's right, look at this No.1000. A perfect specimen of the instructor's disciples! A great example of the biological truth that bitches beget bitches!"

Because of the instructor's ex-disciple rushing in all of a sudden I heard and understood that these are a fusion of doppelgangers and homunculi, and were more or less golems that imitated our previous generation's seniors.

Even that their strength was at least 50% weaker than the originals, and that only the memories were copied so that we couldn't suddenly expect a jump in skills.

But. They were still strong. And the most important thing was.

"Do you have no shame fighting three on seven?!"

"Hahaha, if future villains would be ashamed of just that, then that would be something to be ashamed about!"

"Did you not hear from the instructor? The first strike is crucial. Tunnels are truth. If you'd been learning for at least two years in then you'd understand this."

"If you are angry, resent your cohorts' talents that only three of you passed."

We're too short on numbers.

We are three. Compared to us, they have seven. Their skills are tough enough to begin with, but we're short on numbers as well.

The archdevil that No.17 summoned was sealed and left crying in a corner in just two seconds.

That giant body was nothing more than a sandbag that breathed fire and got beaten.

I always wondered why those evil and strong devils couldn't conquer the world that humans like us were the main strength of, but he was an bodily example of just why that was.

"We wouldn't know since we haven't even been a year!"

Signature move, Sky Slash!

The single strike that came with focusing all my mana onto a single point, the instructor told me that when complete, although he didn't know about the sky, it could definitely split clouds.

Although I don't really know if it's true, it's currently my strongest move that could even dice an archdevil.

"Sky Slash? He really is a just first year."

"It is if he doesn't know there's a counter for that. Heaven's Return(回天)"

And it was returned so easily.

"H, how?!"

"Moron. Did you think that that instructor would teach someone a technique without a counter?"

"Plus your sword path is too linear, too upright. Did you actually expect us to get hit by that?"

"He's still a first year. We took us two years to learn this. Idiot. Ah, now that I think about it these kids are dangerous. We weren't even here in our first year."

"That's true. They are dangerous."

"""So let's step on them here.""

"Damnnn... iit!"

"No.1, you blabbermouth!"

With two people's shouts the intensity of the attacks rose.

Is this really just 50% power? I feel like it's a lie but considering the power of the two seniors we've seen in person the conclusion is that it's not a lie.

Although one used a weird weapon, she made me unable to even resist, and the other took down the three of us handily. And before that they all have issues with their personalities.

If they were normal, they should help teach their juniors to help them grow, not crush them because they were better!

"What, you're just trying to kill us now, aren't you?"

"It's okay, it's okay. You won't die. Hm... probably."

"What the heck's the probably!"

The swords, spears, magic, all followed different paths than they did previously.

Meaning each and every one of their strikes were being aimed at my critical points. Especially.

"Do you have no shame as a woman!"

"The instructor told me that this place was the most critical so it doesn't matter!"

That Intelligence vice-director! This person was a devil even in the old days!

Unlike the others she only aims at one place. And only! Me!

"Why are you only targeting me!"

"Ha, what an obvious question? It's because only men have those bits!"

"S, stop! Kuk?"

The moment I blocked the twelve magic shots aimed at my genitals, someone else struck my side.

"Hm, until you give up on that area, your defeat is certain."

"You crazy bastard, Sia that lunatic bitch is aiming for only that area, do you think you could?"

"I can't. Mm. To be honest aiming for that place even though the instructor is a man, same as us, is he even human?"

"Ha, this little shit. You're asking for common sense. Does he look like a person to you?"

Not even devils could stand up to the instructor?"

Really, it looks like these assholes have truly absorbed the instructor's teachings.

How is it that like master like disciple, neither stop to talk when they're beating someone up?

Wasn't it agreed on that no one touched the hero or the demon king during a conversation? When you look at the stories not even when they have the world on the line they don't hit each other when they're talking, but these assholes hit people really damn well.

"That thingy. That thingy. That thingy."

"Stop it you crazy bitch!"

"Oi kid, be grateful. Normally she charges in with pe000, it took us a lot of struggles and hardship to get her to change it."

"Yeah. She used to come running at us muttering that to the point where we had to wonder is this sexual harassment? Is this a mental attack? It was awful. To be honest it was shameful as hell."

"The instructor probably taught her that knowing all this. To the point that even we were shocked despite the fact we went through all sorts of shit under the instructor. But it was effective, wasn't it?"

"Shut up and stop hitting me!"

My whole body hurts. It hurts. But it's even harder mentally.

Did they use ghosts that died because they couldn't talk or something, they keep on chattering away.

It can't end like this. I need to either retreat or see this through to the end. And I chose the latter.

"Take this for si... kuuk!"

"that thiinngyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!"

"...God of hell Helena, many children are headed for your embrace, please send them to a better place."

"Great goddess of light Sermir, may your brilliance give hope to these poor souls."

In my whitening vision, I saw the male figures making a holy sign and praying, and

that marked the end of my memories of the first attempt at the tenth trial.

And after we replayed this scene a few more times afterwards.

We improved.

“Thingy!”

“Th, this evil god’s apostle!”

“Kurk, as expected of the instructor’s disciple!”

Pathetic screams echoed.

In a month.

We learned a lot of things.

Like No.1000 who learned to target just the enemies genitals.

“Selfdestruct, Surtr.”

“This damn owwnneeeeeerrrr!”

No.17, who strapped all sorts of explosives to the archdevil who annihilated a world as a reusable suicide bomber.

“You crazy bitch, snap out of it!”

“You crazy bitch, where the hell are you aiming friendly fire at!”

“Die for me!”

Or me who sneaked into the instructor’s room and made a deal with the Intelligence vice-director with the instructor’s clothes that I snuck out and turned that 7:3 fight to a 6:4.

“You little shit!”

“What a splendid complement, thank you, senior.”

To be honest I deserved to be acknowledged for that.

I nearly died twice just trying to get clothes from his room.

The instructor's room was filled with a similar number of traps as there were in here.

Open the drawers and a hidden dagger fired from the ceiling, poisoned tacks on the wardrobe handle, and you could hear something calling "open the door..." "I'm bored..." from the safe in the corner.

The instructor's room was filled with so many traps to the extent that I wondered if I was actually in a trial room under illusion magic.

When a black notebook suddenly caught fire when I opened the drawer I wondered what would happen if the instructor found out, but to overcome the current trial I stole away a few of the instructor's clothes.

"Kughh... To think we would be defeated..."

"But we... Are instructor Naruan's worst disciples!"

"Even stronger disciples than us will be waiting..."

"Not, you morons. It's embarrassing enough we got creamed by our juniors, what kind of retarded four heavenly king play are you acting out now."

And just over a month we passed through the tenth gate, we came face to face with a new hardship.

"It's dangerous.

"Yeah."

"Yeah, a rest stop."

""Like hell that would be a thing.""

We imagined all sorts of different things.

Maybe that well that was apparently safe to drink was actually laced with poison, that soft bed was filled not with cotton but poisonous insects, that heater was actually made with dangerous materials to set the entire room on fire the moment it was turned on.

A week later, after checking everything we were certain.

"You fooled us, instructor!"

"...It was a trap."

"He was trying to interfere with us resting peacefully."

There was nothing. Like it said on the sigh, it was a room of rest.

Damn it! I can imagine the instructor's face laughing at our preparations for anything that could happen, even as far as setting up night watches!

And so, after a short rest, we went and came across an absolutely ridiculous trial.

"Die for me! Surtr!"

-Issue a proper command for once you dumbass bitch owner!

"How the hell are we supposed to dodge this!"

"We might die?"

Starting from the magic bombing from the sky, the arrows and spears flying at us from all sides! And in front of us a rock that was even bigger than Surtr was rolling our way!

"Magic formation behind us!"

"Damn it, aren't there any more slaves to be our shields?"

"We do!"

-Kuhahaha. I am hell's devil Baron... Uwuk!

No.1000 instantly grabbed the white-clothed devil that emerged from the magic formation behind us and tossed him above us.

-These, these puny humaaaaannnnnnns

And the nameless devil baron that was sent flying was hit by countless magic shots and was desummoned.

-S, Sir Pekel?! Kuhuk!

"Nice No.1000!"

And I grabbed the devil that revealed the name of the baron devil as Sir Pekel, yet would be unable to reveal his own name, into the space where daggers were flying out of.

-Kuweeeek!

I think we've got the hang of this.

-You accursed assholes! Kuhuk!

-Oh demon god, on these creatures more stubborn than angels and more evil than devils, curse theeeeemmm!

-Shut up! At least you guys are done here, I still have moreaaaaeaeaaaa!

And faster than we expected, in slightly less than a month, thanks to the devils and archdevil(lol) we used as shields, we could safely pass the twelfth trial.

"...That's the end."

"Will it?"

"Knowing the instructor I said there were twelve doors but there's actually a thirteenth. Would be something he could say."

""That's more than possible.""

At the final door which marked the end of the twelfth trial, we swallowed and stopped our hands that were about to push the door open.

No.1000 was right. He'd said this was the twelfth trial, he didn't say that there would only be twelve trials.

"But still... we can only go forward."

"We can go back though?"

"That's not what I meant!"

We hesitated for around an hour.

Finally, we opened the door and went out. And what greeted us was bright sunlight and.

"That was quick. Congratulations, my juniors."

The senior that had greeted us with an incredible vigor, the human called Rein.

And unlike the easygoing laugh that I saw on him previously, the smile he wore now had a fearsome air emanating about it.

“And, bye bye.”

“Dodge!”

Golden hair scattered in the wind, and the brightly smiling face was one that was handsome even if a man looked at it. But with one hand he was waving at us and with the other he held the thing called the bat.

Pang!

“Kuhut?!”

At my sudden shout No.1000 dodged, but No.17 couldn't exhibit the same reflexes as we could. No, before that she probably reflexively set up a magic barrier.

But the moment the bat hit the magic barrier, the magic barrier vanished as if it had never existed in that space.

“Haaht? Urk? Wai, wait! It hurts!”

And began the bat attack. The bat began to land everywhere on No.17's body, and after she let the first strike through, all No.17 could do was whimper.

“Uht? Sa, save... Hnnn?”

“Haha, you're not going to die so rest assured!”

No.17 who was looking at me and No.1000 with desperate eyes and the ex-senpai who smirked down on No.17. Alright, in that case.

“Run!”

“Eh?”

“Hauht? Kuk? Uut? He, help m... Aaah!”

Sorry. But you didn't stop the instructor when he was hitting me either. No, on the contrary when the instructor was hitting me on autopilot you weren't even looking at me as I fainted.

This is all your comeuppance! But I'll remember your sacrifice!

“Did you really think you could run?”

I ran like hell towards the light of the cave entrance, but between me and No.1000 and the sparkling light, the ex-senior person appeared.

“This is already my realm!”

“Damn it, he predrew the magic formation!”

Kang!

“Uuht? Why. Why does it hurt!”

Even at my shouts all he did was lift the bat to attack again.

In response to the bat being swung her way No.1000 instantly brought out two daggers to counterattack but the moment the knives and bat met, No.1000’s condition began to deteriorate very quickly.

“Uuht? What? It hurth? Why?”

No.1000 who had barely managed to stay standing on shaking legs had no choice but to let her knees drop to the ground.

“It hurts? No! Urrk? S, stop!”

It was the first time I heard No.1000’s voice this weak and frail, not even when she failed to eat breakfast was her state this bad.

“Right, now you’re the last one.”

“Urk?!”

In the end I pulled out my sword and poured in as much mana as possible. But not even No.1000’s sharp sword ki could so much as scratch the bat. Could I actually win?

“Were you thinking you could actually win by any chance?”

“Urk?!”

“Hahaha, come at me, brat!”

In in exactly four strikes I started screaming on the ground, and like this, we could only

scream and howl in pain with a feeling of utter helplessness that none of the twelve trials could inflict on us.

Chapter 18

And So The Story Begins (2)

#2 Their story: Ria el Nermia's story

"Kuhk!"

A light strike.

But the intense pain that couldn't possibly have come from that light strike left me unable to breathe for a moment.

"Damn it!"

"Die!"

"Hoho, how weak."

The leisurely movements of the hand and the bat.

But at those slow movements, No.1 and No.1000's strikes which were already faster than most families' normal knights were easily blocked.

"Speed beats weight, weight beats change and change beats speed. The instructor always used to tell us this when he was discussing swordsmanship. No matter how strong you are it will never hit if you fall behind in speed, no matter how fast an attack it will never matter against a changing, adapting sword, and no matter how unpredictable and variable you are, you will fall with a single heavy strike. And."

A smirk and a simultaneous slow stretch of the hand holding the bat.

I dodged immediately, but my body had already been struck.

"Kuhhh... how!"

"Haha, brats. I will teach you the instructor's ultimate truth. If like I said before that there are different styles of swordsmanship, but in the end the strongest one wins! And the winner is justice! If a heavy blow is defeated by a fast one then use a strong

and fast strike! If a fast attack is broken by unpredictability then a fast and unpredictable attack! If unpredictability is beaten down by a strength then use an unpredictable and overpowered single strike! If you are fast and strong and unpredictable then you can just flat out beat anyone!”

“Kyaaaah!”

“Bullshit!”

Looking at No.1000 who collapsed with a scream, No.1 charged in with a shaking hand but the results were pitiful.

The hand that seemed to move slowly seemed to divide into eight and struck all over No.1’s body.

“Kuhuk, uhuk, aaargh! Wait, a, aaaaaaaaaaargghh!”

“Foolish child, brat that has not yet felt the pain of the bat! I shall show thee the truth of life!”

Our senior, who was completely unlike when we first met him now seemed like a demon that worshipped the demon god.

No, something even scarier, his eyes were like a fanatic that worshipped the evil god as he screamed.

“Endure! Endure this paltry amount of pain! If you want to see the limits of life endure this pain and see what lies beyond!”

“Kuk, kuwuk, aaagghh! You crazy asshole! You enduraaaaaagghh!”

“We did. We endured. But beyond, the moment we saw the flash of silver, we were defeated. Those who fall under just the wooden bat have no right to be called our juniors!”

In the fear that momentarily darkened those lunatic eyes, No.1000 and I instinctively took a step back.

“It can’t be... it can’t possibly be!”

“There’s something even higher than that crazy thing?”

“Kuk, li, lies!”

Words that made even the face of No.1, who was getting hit with twelve attacks a second, turn pale.

But our senior, no the monster who had been turned by something nodded.

“That is the reason why you are mere brats.”

We wanted to deny it. But, some kind of vigour, and the determined resolve right in front of our eyes, made all of us keep our mouths shut.

“Do you kids know. Of the pain. The despair. The humiliation!”

“Kuhuk!”

A strong strike. No.1 who let that strike hit home in his belly flew back towards us and caught his ragged breath.

Looking at No.1 look up at him with a twisted face, it seemed the monster felt a lot better.

“Does it hurt? Not for me. So get hit.

“Do you think you will never win? I did too once. But humans are creatures that can adapt as they get hit.

“Among my cohort, I was the weakest. Like the instructor said, I’m an idiot that even lost to an office worker.

“And what should I call you kids that lost to that idiot? Trash? Parasites? Maggots? Now choose. I will call you whatever you want with by big heart!

“Hahaha, Wahahahahahaha!”

Ahh, that person’s already a goner. A devil has already taken over his heart. As I thought that bat was a cursed weapon.

The worst magic weapon that made those hit by it scream in pain and possess the mind of its user! To make that kind of weapon, just what the hell does the instructor do for a living.

Is this why they call an evil organization an evil organization? Is this organization full of these kinds of people?

Is this the reason why the Empire has failed all this time to destroy this organization!

“Bat style, Allegretto movement.(1) Dumdumdumdaboom.”

“Block it, Surtr!”

“Anything, anything but that!”

Along with words that I had no idea of their meaning, an attack came.

I resummoned Surtr as soon as he was unsummoned.

Even if slavery had been abolished from the Empire, this is a summon.

Although it's spirit abuse to the point where I'd possibly get a letter of expulsion from the Summoner's Association, since I'm not a member of the Association yet it doesn't matter.

-Kuuuuuuuk!

Consecutive attacks rained down on Surtr's giant body.

But thanks to Surtr's sacrifice I found the attack pattern!

The 'dum' referred to a simultaneous attack with the bat in the right hand and the left fist, the 'da' was the bat in the right hand, and the 'boom' was a left uppercut.

It was the attack pattern that Surtr's precious sacrifice found out.

“Then block this. Andante movement, dumdumdaboomda!”

“I have already read through you!”

My predictions were right!

Dodge the attack from the left, then left, right, then left again!

“Not bad for a magician, then try this!”

“I said your pattern has already been seen through!”

“Hahaha, the reason I showed you the pattern was for this! Now take this, Larghetto movement, dum...”

A dual handed attack to begin. Next was...

“Kiduk boomdehruhruhbom kidukboomdehruhruh!”

“Wha, what? Kyaaaaah!”

Bat and fist assault my entire body. What the hell is dehruhruhruh! To suddenly use that sort of attack!

“Not bad movements for a magician, but stupid, unlike one! Who the hell would attack telling the enemy their attack patterns? The reason I revealed my attack pattern, was so that I could change it!”

“C, coward!”

“Did you not learn? To be called cowardly is a word used when you have been hit with an unexpected attack or weakness. Before you use that word realize the truth that you couldn’t even imagine the enemy’s attack. Despair that you have had your weakness seized by the enemy. And although I hear this a lot as well, this is an evil organization that specialises in rearing villains. Cowardice is one of our virtues, you know?”

“Ah...”

The swing of the bat with a smile struck me square on the chin and my vision swam. Along with No.1000’s faint screams in the distance my vision gradually turned whiter and whi...

“Now the fun can’t end just here.”

Just before it dyed in white the bat struck my thighs and forced my consciousness back to reality.

“De, devil...”

“Hoho, I’m telling you the real devil exists elsewhere.”

At the monster’s smiling face, for the first time in my life I felt the emotion called despair, and this despair continued until the evil organization was destroyed

#3 Their story: A certain empire’s story.

In the current era of the continent, if you asked what country was the strongest, then ten out of ten, a hundred out of hundred, you would only get one answer.

The Karuan Empire.

Currently the strongest superpower on the entire continent. For five years, this empire went through a bitter five-year war against thirteen big and small nations.

And the result was Karuan Empire's and its allies' overwhelming victory.

Among the neighbouring nations, the only country that could keep them in check, the Merdeia kingdom had lost over half their military might and in reality there was no longer any kingdom that could possibly pose a threat to the empire's borders.

And the person who won the most power during that great war, the one who everyone said would take up the right to succeed the throne, but handed everything to her younger brother and was officially retired from court life, the First Imperial Princess, and in her room two people were gathered.

"Howling has accepted the deal, Your Highness."

"Reia. I've planned over ten years for this. That should be perfectly natural."

The princess elegantly raised the teacup to her lips, and with a smile that would have thrown the palace into a state of emergency and evacuation orders issued had anyone else seen it, said.

"Ten years. It's been ten years since I had everything taken from me, stolen from me, and beaten pathetically as I cried."

"Uh, your Highness. There were many causes for misunderstandings in what you just said if anyone else heard that."

"Cause for misunderstandings? I simply stated what was done to me. The simple truth that had no intent to be misunderstood."

"Your Highness, Sir Ast simply acting in your best interests."

"No, that man said he didn't save me. He said that I was simply saved as I wanted it to be."

"Even if Sir Ast said it like that..."

"No, that man doesn't lie. That was the truth. He simply acted on his own interests, and by his actions I just seemed to be saved from an outsider's perspective. And because of that I'm not acknowledging it. I wasn't saved. Rather, he was the one that took everything from me."

"Your Highness..."

"So I need to find him. And he needs to pay the price for what he stole. And if he can't return it, then he needs to pay it in ways that he can."

As the gossip mill went, an overlord of blood and iron, the ice-blooded witch.

While others were sharing pleasantries and smiling in social circles, the current expression that the current embodiment of the imperial family that was said to have enjoyed blood and despair in the middle of the great war had on her face was much too anxious, and so the woman named Reia couldn't help but smile wryly.

"You're overforcing it."

"I know."

"Sir Ast will vehemently reject it."

"I know. I've suffered a lot too."

"And even if it succeeds the imperial court will flip out."

"I know. But it's already done. From that day onwards, father had already acknowledged him, and I've already finished talking with my more useful little brother with the agreement of handing him the throne. Should my little brother not have been useful but an idiot, I can just give the throne over to the next useful pawn and replace him."

"Um, noonim?(2) I came because you called but it is really scary if I hear those things?"

With the quiet sound of the door opening, a handsome youth came through the door saying so with a bitter smile.

"Doesn't matter. I said it for you to hear anyway."

"Wow, just how could I live with such a scary elder sister."

He flippantly said as he approached but there was no change in his expression.

Even though he'd taken the seat of Crown Prince thanks to her backing, at one point, he was one of three who had split court along with his brother nicknamed the King of the North and his sister, the Witch of the Imperial Family.

To the thought that he, who had unofficially taken authority second only to the emperor would be pushed around by his sister would totally

"Do you want me to kill you?"

"I'm sorry."

...totally thinkable. Overwhelmingly so.

“I’ve said it before, but there’s only one reason I picked you. Simply, I liked you better.”

“Yes, yes. I heard loud and clear. Especially when you gave elder brother minus marks because you didn’t like his face, I know even better. The explanations that if big brother ever found out he’d either collapse clutching his neck or regroup and raise up another rebellion, I still remember fresh as if it was yesterday!”

“Good. At least you know.”

Placing down her empty cup of tea, the princess smiled again.

On seeing that smile the Crown Prince took two big steps backwards but the princess didn’t care, all she did was wait for Reia to refill her teacup before raising it back to her lips.

After a short silence, the princess said.

“So do your job well.”

“Hnng... You gave me a really hard task, big sis.”

“It’s just crushing some cockroaches, no?”

“It’s a skilled cockroach that’s been around since the beginning of the Empire.”

“If you’re going to be the greatest in the Empire then you should at least have the skill for that. Give it all up if you don’t want to.”

“Ah, did I become Crown Prince for this... to be ashamed and suffer...”

The Crown Prince rubbed his eyes with an expression that screamed of tiredness but the princess didn’t even bother to turn his way and simply admired the aroma of the tea.

“Didn’t you make a bargain with Howling, noonim?”

“I did. About keeping the information secret, that is. I never handed over the information, nor did I attack Howling using others as a proxy. However, nowhere in the Geass Roll did it say I wouldn’t end the organization with my own hands.”

“Did you need to destroy them? When all’s said and done, they’ll revive under another name after the dust settles anyway.”

“But, we can destroy that person’s nest.”

Looking at the princess who had a smile that could bewitch almost any man on her face, the Crown Prince had backed all the way to the wall.

"Ah, noonim, it's scary so could you please stop smiling like that? It's really bad for my heart so please!!"

"Oh my, there's no need to be so scared. I'm feeling very good right now?"

"Ha? Can you really say that considering your direct subordinate Sir Reia is shivering in the corner over there? Sir Reia's trauma's been triggered again!"

Glancing at Reia who had buried her face between her knees in the corner murmuring something incomprehensible, the princess stopped smiling.

"What, did I ever do wrong?"

"It was at the level where you'd brought out your personal forces, battlemage brigade and advisory staff and ready to go to war at any moment? Everyone who knows something knows of the smile before the massacre during the great war."

"Eei, killing people during a war is a one-sided thing, right? You can't call it a massacre."

"You meant to say normal, right? It's totally just my imagination that the reason I heard it as one-sided was that the pronunciations are similar, right?" (3)

"Hm? What? I can't hear the sounds of a crown prince that got smashed three times by the Merdeia's Kingdom's army?"

"Yes, I will keep my mouth shut in front of the great war's undefeated noonim."

As if the Crown Prince's crumpled face pleased her, her hand reached for her teacup again, but it was empty.

Since Reia who would pour tea for her was currently broken and neglected in a corner of the room, thinking it couldn't be helped, she stood up and stretched.

"Haa~ Listen up, little brother. You can think that what he took as half of the Empire."

"I know that. The origins of the Empire's founding. But that is a curse."

"Yes. And when he dies, it could come back to us."

"Because that's how the contract was written."

"And because of that we need to protect him."

"For the Empire?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that a lie? No matter how I see it it's a personal greed."

"Really. At least 1% of it is for the Empire's good."

"99% is for your own interests? At the very least as royalty couldn't you raise it to two digits noonim?"

"No."

Having felt a strong sincerity in that final word the Crown Prince shut his mouth.

“1% is a lot as well. To be honest be grateful that I’ve done that much for my role as an imperial princess. It’s been ten years. Because I was weak. Because I was powerless. Because I had no backing. I couldn’t get anywhere near him for ten whole years. If I approached carelessly he would flee. Considering how he’s fearless in the weirdest places he’s also very cowardly in others. He makes two, three, no, ten, twenty getaway holes to escape with. That’s why. So he can’t run away. I’ll break them all. Aside from the ladder that is me, I’ll break all other ladders. To make him realise on his own that I am his safest ladder. So that he can never run away again.”

“What you know about him might not be everything. His name was different as well, wasn’t it?”

“Irrelevant. Whether his name is Ast, or Naruan, or something else. The fact that he stole my fate, my future, my everything and ran away from me doesn’t change. Even if what I know about him isn’t everything, what I already know is plenty. So...”

After a moment’s silence, she turned to the Crown Prince that had been ever-so-slowly approaching her and smiled brightly.

“If you fail, really. I might have to kill you.”

‘I’m really going to die.’

At seeing that smile, the Crown Prince realised that if he didn’t smash Howling to bits, then odds were that he would be the one to be smashed into pieces instead.

Chapter 19

And So The Story Begins (3)

It's weird. It's weird. It's weird.

What is this? It's easy. Way too easy.

An easy job like this might as well be given to new agents that just graduated from the training centers. No, even easier. It's about as easy as the trainees' graduation exam.

But... they're paying me this much? Does the organization have that much money lying around?

No, even if it was, they shouldn't be giving me a job this easy when I'm busy with instructor work. It reeks of something awful.

"The problem is which side..."

Is it the organization? What's the problem? Did they find out about my embezzlement of some of the Utopia Project funds?

Or when I made deals with the non-humans, did they find out I did a deal with them to sneak some of the cash into my own back pocket?

Or did one of my bloody disciples finally decide he or she wanted payback for all that time?

No, I can't rule out the possibility of the Empire. It's normally an irrelevant place, but that insane imperial princess could have dug a trap by removing all the key information.

Like a master fisherman throwing out a baited line waiting in anticipation for the big catch to bite.

But knowing my life so far, if I ran away thinking with that logic, it could just as easily

turn out it actually was just a plain easy job, and I got scared for nothing and ended up getting chased by the organization! Is the sort of story that could happen.

So do the job and infiltrate for the time being. If I get caught by the organization then I can use my connections I've made till now to do something, if I get caught by the princess, then I need to bide my time and run away.

Unless I end up waking up without arms or legs and a "I still love you even this way!" type yandere is around, hm... Uhh... now that I think about it that could be more than possible. Normally reality is a lot worse than fiction. But I just imagined it. Damn it.

"I'll give it a shot."

Just a barony. And one far out in the countryside to boot. So I infiltrated in to collect information.

I'd hoped the information I'd find was something along the lines of an evil god cult's hidden hideout, or some anti-empire resistance organization, those kinds of uneasy expectations!

Wow, isn't this way overdoing it?

No matter that this is the literal middle of nowhere of the empire, they're all but openly stating that they're an anti-empire rebel(AER) army.

A month since I was hired as a gardener, today as well I received orders that I couldn't tell whether they were gutsy or just plain stupid.

"Now, do it like this."

"Yes, boss."

I took a pair of gardening shears and trimmed a bush in the garden to form a shape, this is a perfect AER symbol.

The emblem engraved on the statue far away over there was the AER symbol along with the house's symbol.

There were already so many AER symbols everywhere that if this was the capital, the entire family would already have been arrested to be served the full torture course.

No, right now I'm so damn anxious at this point I'd actually prefer it if some AER members showed up, isn't this apprehensive feeling because of some different reason entirely?

If they're outright plastering the symbol everywhere the empire's army could just charge in at any moment and take us all in!

Is this a trap, or is this the Empire's trap! At this rate surely it won't end up with me in the imperial prisons shouting "I'm innocent!" and either my former subordinates or the princess herself showing up and making me choose between marriage or death, right?

"Ohh, you've got good skills."

"I've done this since I was young. If I couldn't I'd have starved to death."

I push away my unease for now and show off my shearing skills.

Hmm. Although I'd learned this on the fly but this is still an imperial gardener-level skill!

It would be hard to see this level of skill in a rural barony.

The princess as a kid was filthily hard to please so since most people assigned close to Her Highness lasted three months tops, 1 month at the shortest and so I had to pick up the slack and learn the other employees' skills.

Well because of this her half-imprisoned knight order all became multitalented. Because they couldn't even run away.

"It's done."

"Ohh, perfect. Good work, Kisen. I'll put in a good word for you to my lord and have you as a permanent gardener for the family."

"Thank you, boss."

Although I say that with my mouth please don't. I don't want to go into the AER.

To be honest they're all just playing on the Emperor's hands, every time something big happens in the Empire he just grabs a few of them and executes them as a distraction,

I have no wish to get tangled up with them any time soon.

As for the personality of our emperor, you could say it's trash among trash. Even our boss who's the head of an evil among evil organizations would be a saint compared to him.

Considering the purges in the imperial court were worse than the purges at the organization, I think that explains it all.

What kind of imperial court has more purges than an evil organization. Because it's the strongest? Is there that many talented people!

"But I still have a really bad feeling about this."

As it stands I've already gone and made three more AER symbols where they're already overflowing.

Although to them it's a symbol of secrecy, to think they'd go and stamp this pushover-confirming symbol which is known to just about everyone among the empire's agents and personnel alike.

And the organization ordered me to collect information. If I had around another month then I could grab everything I need to, but there's no guarantee that the imperial army won't charge in first.

So...

"You are already surrounded!"

"D, damn it! Shit! Destroy all the important information, meet up at the promised place!"

Let's go and take some relevant-looking documents and report it to the imperial troops. At the organization I can just say that the AER got caught by the empire's troops and I snuck out in the confusion.

Hmm. Although it's a bit of a pity that my creations are going up in flames, compared to my life they're not worth anything at all.

Just in case, I'm observing them with a dwarven telescope after hiding myself. At my

rough estimates it seems that they're freshly trained new recruits. Thankfully it doesn't seem like the imperial family's involved in this case.

If there were, then someone would be tapping me on my shoulder, and when I turn around I'd see either the princess or her direct subordinates, with one of the princess's personal battlemage corps priming a magic artillery circle above my head, telling me to surrender or die.

But I can't relax with just this. Let say for example, an arrow comes flying out from that brush.

Fhit! Fhit! Fhit!

Hmm, or a bunch of people wearing black clothes show up.

Shuk! Shuk! Shuk!

And spout lines saying come peacefully or get hurt.

"Instructor Naruan! This is the organization's orders. I strongly urge you to come peacefully."

Wow, what are these kids that're all third-rate villains from their appearance and their lines. It's exactly our organization's style.

And it actually is our organization. This is why I like our organization. It doesn't stand out too much and get sacked by the empire.

"What's the problem?"

Depending on the situation it might be better to just go along with them.

Seriously, just how much have I done for them till now! And how much in the way of bribes have I fed them! It was all in preparation for this moment!

I even had dinner with your department's manager, and you! It's not bad trying those kinds of lines.

"Instructor."

Uh, hang on, this isn't good.

"Rood, what brings you all the way here."

Aruen Rood.

A beastkin half-blood, a disciple of my third cohorts along with Sia and Rein. And the one standing as captain of the most unique paramilitary group among all our paramilitary groups.

When the other kids were vice-director or vice-captain at best, there was only one reason why this kid was the captain.

Because only his unit, the Darksword, could change their captain with brute force.

With the aim of eliminating internal enemies, the Darksword is a group that only acts on the boss's direct orders.

And that means...

"Can I take it as you do not mean to leave me alive?"

They're a group used purely for assassination. Ah, or could it just be he's here to give me one for? If any of them were to give it a crack I'd thought he'd be the one most likely to.

"It is not."

"The Darksword has mobilised, yet you're leaving me alive? Sounds a bit hard to believe."

Ah, or is it that the boss found out about my embezzlement, but he's sent my disciple to take it easy on me?

Alright, considering what I've done for him so far he could let me off easily. In that case I could pretend to just go along and be captured...

"The imperial princess has made a deal."

Or bullshit.

What the hell! I need to run like my life depends on it. Just what the hell did she do, that a group of the boss's direct subordinates is out to get me?

His mind was like my past life's Freedomland(1) which said it would never make a deal with the Empire! That boss made a deal!

"It seems the imperial family took quite a liking to you, instructor. To the point that the princess herself slowly drew the noose around the organization's neck."

"It's not that much."

It's really not. Yep. It's not.

Although I did make quite the achievements during the great war, but I rolled my subordinates how stupidly hard!

I rolled them about as much as you would in a black soul game. I made them roll and roll and roll even more to the point that they said "ah, what. War is easier than training?" while laughing, that was how hard I rolled them on a daily basis.

Although my own disciples rolled as if their lives were still attached to their bodies but those kids were pretty disposable so I basically rolled them to the point it wouldn't matter if they died.

And because of that the princess's direct troops = bunch of fellows that would stick their swords in my backs at any moment, and you want me to go back?

And the imperial princess is there too.

The princess who's so perpetually lively that I'd prefer the one with dead soulless eyes that I first met.

She's so damn lively that in the past it was just to the point that I would just get fired if I annoyed her, but now she's lively enough to tear me from limb to limb if I piss her off.

I will be forcibly married!

To hell with it, I was being an annoying little shit because I wanted to be fired, what's this bullshit. The emperor's got his head screwed on wrong as well. You can't get it more screwed than that.

Even if it had the official approval of the imperial family, i.e. the princess, but she's saying she's marrying a commoner whose background is unknown, so what the hell was he sending me a message of congratulations for?

The normal thing to do would be to threaten me discreetly, or if he'd come with a large sack of money to tell me to take it and piss off, I'd have more than happily taken it and run.

But even when a person is worrying this much the surrounding people are still preparing with clinking sounds.

I'd preferred it if they'd let their guard down a bit.

"Then will you come quietly with me?"

"Hell no."

If I go I'm dead.

No, dying is the easy way out.

To think I'd go back with my own two feet to a place that starts purges out of boredom, a political fight when they're bored that makes me struggle with my brain.

And under the premise of marriage to royalty, and among them, that imperial princess. There is absolutely no reason for me to voluntarily return that insanity among insane worlds.

"Then, I, your disciple will escort you personally."

Very unlike his normal behaviour he formally bows his head and pulls out a greatsword, and as he did the others pulled out their weapon as well and pointed them towards me.

Ha. Seriously. Damn he's brought a lot of them. Just the ones in my field of vision alone number around at least fifty, and considering he's also brought others like the ones

with the bows surrounding me as well, he's probably brought at least a hundred fighters?

Did he bring everyone in the Darksword or something?

"Do you really think you can take me?"

"I've grown a lot since then."

"Rein said the exact same thing not so long ago and he wasn't much."

"He was always the weakest among us."

"You're that confident, and yet you bring the entirety of the Darksword on me?"

"I was taught to prepare for the worst even if the probability of victory was over 90%."

I never taught you to use that on me.

Wow, look at those sparkles.

Sword ki is a given, there's a few that looks like they're going to hit sword aura soon as well. Ah, this is dangerous.

Should I just run away and yell to the imperial army it's an evil organization!

No, since the princess started all this they could yell you evil cur! And blindside me instead.

In that case I need to finish it here.

Damn it, I need to sneak back to the organization to pack what I need and run away again...

To start with I'll send a help call with the voice of my soul.

-Don't wanna.

An immediate answer came. Says no.

-Haaang, you've done neglect play with me all this time and you're calling for me as soon as you disciple shows up to stick something pointy in you? Do I look that easy to you?

That... alright, let's try this.

-If I die I'll tell my disciples the password to my safe!
-Wazzat for? To let me have fun under a new owner?
-No, because I'm certain that the kids'll melt you down the moment they see you.
-... Wut. What's with that weirdly convincing argument...

Eh, it worked.

To be honest from Rood or any of the others of Sia's cohort's point of view this kid was nothing less than the demon king of the end of the century.

-Hmm... don't really like it cause it feels like I'm losing out... but if owner dies that's that too...

-I'll take you around from now on. The organization's already fubar. It made a deal with the imperial princess.

-Hmm... hmmmmmmmm... Ah, dunno. If you lock me away one more time then I really dunno what's gonna happen then.

And the thing connected to my soul, is speaking to me. To call its name. To open the gate, and let it come to me.

The feeling of summoning a contracted spirit that I'd read in a book. Maybe, this would be similar to that as well.

This was a miracle made due to a ritual of a different type of contract. Because it was the only object that I, without any mana whatsoever, that every other summon rejected, could successfully contract with.

"Magic?"

"Weren't we told Instructor Naruan couldn't use magic?!"

"Do not be alarmed and attack!"

The men that were shocked by the silver light in my right hand charged in.

But, the face of their captain Rood was the only one to pale at the sight.

"C, could it be..."

"Come..."

And that ‘could’ is right. Yep. It’s exactly what you’re thinking of.

“Arcadia.”

A flash of silver light lit up the night sky.

Chapter 20

And So The Story Begins (4)

#4 Their story: Aruen Rood's story

Ahhhh. I don't want to work. I really really don't want to. But reality is cruel.

"The objective is Instructor Naruan."

Ah, I don't want to have anything to do with that human anymore.

To think I have to crawl back to the man who beat the crap out of me so much in primary training.

And worse, he's an enemy this time. Knowing the instructor there's no way he'd come peacefully, and if I harmed so much as a hair on his head then that girl Sia would definitely drive a few knives into my stomach without hesitation.

Actually, I don't know what the male Sia in Internal Affairs, Maren would do either.

The Intelligence Agency is scary but Internal Affairs isn't a lightweight either.

If they cut down on the budget for arrows just a tiny bit then we'd have only five arrows instead of ten.

I'm scared. The fanatics are scary, the person himself is scary. If he's carrying around just one of those damned magic weapons then all my will to fight vanishes instantly.

"How much of our troops are we bringing along?"

The damn vice-captain keeps asking me. Even if we look like this we'd at least be more than a match for your average knight order.

All members are capable of using sword ki. If the squad leaders were given the time then some of them could even hit the swordsmaster level, they're that skilled.

Well, according to the instructor only the ones that can do it would do it. You could say that they could die always at the precipice of becoming a swordsmaster, but if it's that level of combat potential then that's already gone beyond the fighting power of a powerful kingdom's knight order.

A small number of elites. The organization's blackened knives.

Boss's swords that exist only to cull the traitors among our allies.

And the leader of that group is me. But still, I hate what I hate. And so.

"Get everyone ready."

"Everyone?"

The instructor said this.

There's nothing as powerful in a fight as force of numbers. No matter how useless they are they can still be used as a meat shield so use them if you can.

It's a time-honoured tradition that humans can be used just about anywhere as long as they listen to instructions, and unless there's a moron with a pointlessly high title present, take as many people as your logistics team allows.

And so, for a fight against the instructor the right thing to do is to take everyone.

"The enemy is Instructor Naruan."

"I heard the rumours, but I also heard that he has no mana."

"But we could never defeat that person that had no mana, not even once."

"...Not even captain?"

"Yes. Let alone 1:1, even when all seven of us rushed him together we never earned a single victory."

To be honest I can't even beat him with pure swordplay alone either, but that gap can be made up with magic.

But the instructor's magic weapon surpasses all imagination.

To begin with, if you get hit then that's one out already.

Just as we got used to that another one showed up. And if you get hit by that then that's not just a simple out.

My body was definitely swimming in the River Styx but my soul remained in the land of the living and accepting the torment.

It doesn't even make sense. The body says it's going to die and so it's going to go die but the soul and consciousness stays in the land of the living and keeps feeling the beating!

It's not something anyone could possibly imagine without experiencing it.

To add insult to injury even after being hit by that pain your body wakes up the next morning feeling almost refreshed!

I guarantee it. If you would compare it to the demons where the demon god's apostles are chosen to become the next demon king, not even the demon god's blessing where a hundred out of a hundred die screaming in pain would get anywhere near the pain of that magic weapon.

At least that thing has the decency to kill you? This thing won't even let you die.

And so, using all the surveillance options I had available, I confirmed whether the instructor had the bat on him.

The result, in the case of the bat, Rein's currently in possession of it and is diligently beating the crap out of our juniors.

Hmm. I kinda envy him.

And as for the most important metal bat, the instructor said he left it in his office. Considering he said it's an educational tool, he doesn't seem to take it out on assignments.

Just in case I checked another 25 times. This is important after all.

"Going over the mission again. Our job is to capture the instructor alive, and take him to the promised location. Since there is the possibility that the Empire's forces could

attack us after we hand the instructor over, take caution.”

That’s what I’m saying, but I still fear the instructor. I suppose the same went for the rest of our cohort.

Our fear of the metal bat in particular even created the miracle of our entire cohort graduating a year early after all.

Was there ever a time in my life where I felt as powerless, despairing, shivering in fear as I desired death?

Even the instructor-fanatics Sia and Maren, when the metal bat came out, both of them were dead serious in front of the instructor.

No, from the name itself, just what is a bat.(1) No matter how thoroughly I searched through the organization’s information network there was nothing that led me to the word’s origins.

Since I went as far back as the ancient texts, this was a word the instructor invented. Bat... just hearing the name alone strongly reeks of a powerful curse.

As I chewed over my past’s painful memories we’d already arrived in three days.

Ahh, damn it. Time went by filthily quickly. We headed to the promised barony in advance to surround him...

“You are already surrounded!”

“D, damn it! Shit! Destroy all the important information, meet up at the promised place!”

Uh, fuck. It’s burning.

It’s burning really well even from as far away as we are. According to plan we’d infiltrate and capture the instructor secretly, at this rate we’ll be the ones getting captured fighting the empire’s forces.

A direct fight with the empire isn’t possible.

It’s not like we’d lose, but their organizational power is so good when you’re beating

one of them up five more spring up to take a crack at you.

And once you beat those five then another multiple of those spring up and you beat them up and you get tired and eventually succumb to sheer numbers.

“Has he been captured by the empire?”

“No. The instructor has no reason to be captured by just those forces. Look around at places that are absent of people, and once you find him, do not approach, but get in contact.”

Please, if things don't go according to plan I can just say he got away, but if he is found then I need to go capture him...

But these damn subordinates seem to be useful. He said he discovered the instructor hiding in the bushes on a hill while watching the house burn through a telescope.

His eyes were always pretty good and he found hidden things quite well as a result, but now he went and found the instructor as well.

Damn it. I swore to myself that when we got back I'd do my damnest to drop his eyesight.

All the men assembled, and fired arrows from far away as a warning shot.

In return for having no mana he was very sensitive to bloodthirst and presence so arrows were fired so he couldn't get anywhere far, and just in case I sent forward some weak guys as meat shields to start a conversation.

“Instructor Naruan! This is the organization's orders. I strongly urge you to come peacefully.”

“What's the problem?”

Wow that's totally a third-rate villain line even to my ears. The instructor's talking with a look on his face that says he really can't be bothered with all this. It's not going to work. Let's try the peaceful route first.

“Instructor.”

“Rood, what brings you all the way here.”

Ah, mm. He's scowling.

Then again if I was a member of the organization and the Darksword came for me I'd probably get annoyed as well.

"Can I take it as you do not mean to leave me alive?"

"It is not."

"The Darksword has mobilised, yet you're leaving me alive? Sounds a bit hard to believe."

Even though we specialize in taking care of our own organization agents, it's not like we kill all of them.

We dispose of roughly nine out of ten, the other one is usually sent off to the torture rooms. But the objective here is none other than the deal with the princess. Because of that we need to take him alive. If I can't, then I might as well run away as well.

"It seems the imperial family took quite a liking to you, instructor. To the point that the princess herself slowly drew the noose around the organization's neck."

"It's not that much."

Yeah, right.

Right now all the brains of the organization are in panic mode. Let alone all our hideouts, all our secret branches, even our list of secret agents were all looted. Especially that punk Rein in particular, although he might not know it himself, if the princess leaked his information it wouldn't be odd for his head to be sent flying.

To think the man all his girls knew was actually an evil organization's spy and the voice that whispered love into their ears was actually just a ruse to get information from them!

That can't be anything less than a perfect scenario to die with a sword through you.

"Then will you come quietly with me?"

Quietly, but with all my heartfelt pleas. Please, for the sake of all of us I wished for that, but as I thought the instructor didn't desire our happiness.

“Hell no.”

“Then, I, your disciple will escort you personally.”

After very politely, very slowly lowering my head, I slowly unsheathed my greatsword. Very slowly, every action slowly. Because then my subordinates will step out first.

I have no good memories of engaging that man in a close-quarters fight.

Of course the guys attacking him from the rear were beaten first because they were annoying. And I was beaten because I was sturdy.

In the end all my memories are of getting hit, but who knows? There're at least fifty people just here, he could get tired from hitting them all, right?

“Do you really think you can take me?”

“I've grown a lot since then.”

“Rein said the exact same thing not so long ago and he wasn't much.”

“He was always the weakest among us.”

“You're that confident, and yet you bring the entirety of the Darksword on me?”

“I was taught to prepare for the worst even if the probability of victory was over 90%.”

Even as I talked I signaled to my subordinates.

Although I didn't move, my subordinates started drawing their swords, lifting their spears, each of them pulled out their weapon and crept closer to him.

Very good. If anything happens then they'd be the first to suffer.

Just then, a silver light started radiating out from the instructor's right hand.

“Magic?”

“Weren't we told Instructor Naruan couldn't use magic?!”

“Do not be alarmed and attack!”

My surprised subordinates started to run in, but unlike them, I was stepping backwards.

No. The instructor couldn't possibly use magic. But, could it be. that...

“C, could it be...”

“Come... Arcadia.”

This is a trap! This has to be the instructor’s trap!

But the silver club in his hands is definitely the thing I know.

Definitely, the instructor pulled it out of thin air as if he had used magic.

Was it a lie that he couldn’t use magic until now? Wait, before that did that mean that thing was not an illusion but the real deal?

“Kuaaaaaaaaaaghhh!!!”

“Kuooooooooooooook!”

“Uuuk... uwwaaaaa...”

But the moment the first swords collided with that magic weapon I realised that was the real thing.

The absolute magic weapon where evasion was the only way to survive, the thing that sword ki wouldn’t even leave a scratch on, and on the contrary, the magic weapon that would cause one to scream in an unknown realm of pain as it rode down through the end of the weapon and into your body, there was only one weapon in the world that could do that.

Not even the demon god’s arms that the demon king is said to use would be that awful.

Only the magic weapon of the evil god who threatened the downfall of the world would be able to compare to it.

‘No, perhaps incomparable even to that!’

“Dodge, dodge! You may not even make contact with that magic weapon!”

I shout a command, but it’s not as easy as it sounds. The instructor’s close combat skills are legendary within the organization.

Even if he was slightly older than the average new trainee, during their first practical training expedition as a tertiary trainee, his cohort came across a group of ten orcs,

whereupon they all fell into a panic. The tale that he whipped them into formation and cut down all ten orcs then and there are still whispered among the trainees like a legend.

Even though it hadn't been more than a few years since he started learning the sword, and not even normal orcs, but ten Orc Warriors!

Isn't that like some tale of a swordmaster's past that you'd only ever find in story books!

That instructor has the unblockable invincible magic weapon in his hand. We're already screwed. Running away is the answer.

-All archers are to fire at will, cover the retreat of the injured!

"Didn't you say that you couldn't use magic?"

Let's buy time with words. Thirty of us are down already. Let's save my life with my mouth as I run away.

"That's right. But that can be solved if I'm not the one using magic."

"That's impossible!"

"No, it can. What if this thing was an Ego Weapon?"

"Lies!"

But the one who was shocked was me. What disgusting magic weapon like that had an ego!

What is an ego!

A living miracle of a soul being infused into a weapon. Is it not a weapon where even the dwarves might make one once a millennium or so?

All that remained were rumours that they might be in a dragon's lair or one of the imperial treasures was one, in the last 1000 years, aside from the sword the legendary hero used there was not a single case of an ego weapon appearing.

No, none of that's important, but why did have to be that devil's weapon, no, the evil god's weapon that had to have an Ego!

“Then first, you need a beating.”

“N, no way!”

I dodged the first strike by throwing my sword which was said to be a warrior’s life, and turning back on my fallen comrades I started to escape.

“Yes way.”

And that escape ended in the very next strike.

Chapter 21

And So The Story Begins (5)

"In, Instructor! Please!"

Yep. Not happening. This is your punishment for trying to blindside your benevolent instructor.

Repent as you scream in pain!

"Kuaaaaaaaagh!"

"He, help me!"

"No, no just kill me!"

I bat away his hand that was reaching for his sword as he crawled towards it.

"I will not permit you to die."

"No, noooo!"

-Yes! Ahhh, that's the feeling... I wanted to feel this so much...

It feels like my mind's getting polluted by the metal bat's ecstatic moans. At this rate I'll become a sadist.

This is why I didn't want to use this thing. But it can't be helped now.

"Ple, please... kill me..."

"Kuaaaaaaah, no, nooooo!"

I mainly focus on beating the ones who are crawling around drooling on the ground.

Since the ones who have already been hit enough are the ones going "uuuuuhhhhhh" while plastered to the ground like a wad of chewed gum all I have to do is hit the ones that are still moving.

Ah especially, I need to give my disciple a special extra beating. Since he's a beastkin as well as being sturdy as hell he holds on well.

"Kuaaaaaaak! Stop, please stop!"

-Haaang, it's been a while oppa.(1) I see you still have that nice meaty texture you did back in the day!

Since a brat's shouts of joy and a brat's shouts of pain are both ringing in my ears it's giving me a headache.

In that case I should reduce the sources of noise by one at least.

"Kuaaaaaaak!"

-A perfect 17 consecutive hits! Owner's combo is perfect!

One by one I reduce the numbers.

I did consider finishing them off, but I'll leave them here to tie up the empire's forces.

-Owner? Why aren't you hitting them more? Hurry, hurry! Aru is, feeling really good right now, so now's the best time to hit them!

Ahh, this goddamn sadist. Its voice ringing in my head is making my head hurt but I still have work to do.

Since it seems like the organization's washed their hands of me, I scattered the AER evidence that I didn't need any more and fired a signal flare that I'd secretly pocketed.

-Owner, owner! If you play with fire at night then you'll piss your pants!

Is this thing serious. But if I get caught by the princess then I'll piss even more so it doesn't matter!

Due to all my weird-ass experiments the fact that this thing has an ego was a stroke of fortune but the personality that got in it is the worst.

It's said the sword the emperor uses is silent and stoic, and it's also knowledgeable of a thousand styles, so even if you're just wielding it then it'll even act as a

swordsmanship teacher, but this thing goes haakhaak and tries to turn its wielder to the path of the sadist.

-Eh? Owner, did you just diss me? You're telling me that I'm worse the empire's sword? This cute and beautiful goddess Arcadia, is worse than that old sword?!

And our minds are linked disgustingly well it reads my mind every now and then, so it's annoying as hell.

Even though I want to craft another one, the dwarves are refusing to, plus this is the only success among countless failures, the general consensus among the craftsmen that made it is that its creation might as well be a miracle.

And since I need to find a new workplace too...

Even if I try to make another one with the gold I pinched from the empire and pinched from the organization the cost is a problem.

I chucked in all sorts of legendary metals to the point that mithril was the cheapest metal present, and the alloy produced underwent painstaking engraving work to link together hundreds of sorcery and magic formations, to create an ego sword, no an ego bat with 108 curses and 256 blessings, the production costs involved in that was massive enough to be able to compare it with the imperial budget.

Thankfully since I was on pretty good terms with other races so even if they dropped the price to the manufacturing cost, the price was still astronomical!

Thankfully during the great war I pawned off all the other expensive things the nobility of other kingdoms had on hand and so I barely became free of debt.

Although it didn't take too long for me to fall into debt again.

"No, you're the best."

-Haang, of course.

Now, since it's about time for the empire's soldiers to arrive let's get away.

Even if the Darksword is caught, whatever happens, happens. The princess could kill them for letting me get away, or she could just lock them in the dungeons because she never trusted them in the first place.

Or she could take them in secretly and use them as hunting dogs to track me.

Hm. Should I have just killed them right here right now?

But the signal flare's already been shot.

So no matter what happens,

That's also musubi.(1)

#5 Their story: A certain empire's story.

"Your Majesty, please enlighten your lowly subjects."

"Please enlighten your lowly subjects."

"Ah, even the local market would be quieter than this."

"Your Majesty, being discreet with your words in these meetings would be..."

"It's not like you haven't already cast silence spells around us anyway."

"Ahh, your little shit. If you know then shut up before I have to use it."

"Hoho, look at this buddy. I'm the emperor?"

"Then do I just need to start a revolution?"

"I'm sorry."

Seeing the emperor who had his head bowed and looking absolutely not like an emperor at all, his head of security and long-time friend Arten sighed.

"So why did you poke Howling which was sitting nice and fine. We left that place alone because it was too annoying to bring down."

"My scary daughter said she was going to destroy it just to kidnap a single man."

"Like father like daughter. Why the heck are both of your scales of imagination so damn massive. To think she'd destroy the empire's biggest organization all because she wanted to kidnap a man."

"Dunno. I don't know about the other kids, but since it's Atia I need to listen."

"Mmnn... to think she'd still be alive."

"Yeah, I didn't think she'd survive either. Although my heart hurts as a dad it can't be helped as an emperor."

"Do you even bother taking care of your kids? In that case you might as well sort out that damn successor problem already."

"The empire's right to the throne has always been a bloodbath with plenty of history and tradition behind it. I beat the crap out of all my brothers for this seat. But unlike

my time I still minimized the number of massacres, you know?"

"Yes yes, no need to be so humble."

"I was always a pretty talented guy."

For a moment Arten was tempted to throw a punch but barely held onto the limits of his patience.

"It's the emperor. The one in front of you is the emperor. No matter how trash he is, and he's a wretch that deserves to be thrown out in the burnable trash, but he's still the emperor," he muttered as he clenched onto his staff tightly.

"Alright then you talented asshole. So your talented daughter threw a fit to get rid of Howling, and the morons that got nice and fat off Howling are crying for an explanation so what are you going to do."

"What else. Leave them. My boy has already listened to his sister and taken the army out. So what."

"The fuck you just say you retard?"

"Hey, I'm the emperor?"

Arten's face suddenly contorted in fury that even took the emperor aback.

"Oi, does it make any sense at all that the Crown Prince left and I didn't know about it? I'm the chief of security for the imperial family. My subordinates are guarding this place like a fortress and the damn Crown Prince of all things can slip by without even a word in my ear? And where the hell did he get those soldiers from?"

"Ah, if you mean that, that's easily solved if he takes the soldiers that guard the imperial palace. They can leave without you none the wiser, highly experienced and usable without anyone knowing anything!"

"Oh, that's it."

Listening to those words Arten made an expression that said 'Ah, I didn't think of that!'

And he said to the emperor who looked very proud of himself.

"So, that your last will and testament?"

"Oi, hold on?"

Looking at Arten who was steadfastly ignoring the shocked emperor and continued to cast his incantation, the emperor hurriedly grabbed onto Arten's legs and begged.

“Um, Lord Arten? Um, could you please listen to me?”

“You’re interrupting my cast. Go sit down in that corner over there and wait for a comfortable death.”

“Excuse me? This is treason?”

“Hm? So what. So today’s the day that I get to tick treason off my bucket list!”

“Kuaaak! To think there was a villain so close that aimed for the emperor’s throne!”

The moment the emperor stood up and shouted, the incantation was complete.

“Now, burn, Death’s Hellfire.”

“Eh, wait up, this is no joke!”

Kang!

The emperor shouted while instantly drawing his sword and slicing the white flame into two, but all Arten did was click his tongue and mutter “tch, it failed.” under his breath.

“Oi, even though we’re friends this is still treason?”

“From a very long time ago, they said the whip was the cure for stupidity.”

“Oi, even if I used your subordinates willfully, they’re still my subordinates in the end as well?”

“And if you take away all the palace guards before that, who’s going to stop a potential actual treasonous plot.”

“You and me?”

“You think that’s possible?!”

“It isn’t?”

For a moment Arten’s mouth closed. Now that he thought about it it actually did seem possible.

He was a archmagician who was one of the best in the continent, and aside from assorted lords of Magic Towers of a significantly large scale there were few that could match him.

And the emperor in front of him wasn’t just some moron that seemed like a crazy punk, he actually was a crazy little fuck, and back when he was still the Crown Prince he was known with one of the five greatest titles of swordsmanship in the continent,

the Sword King.

In terms of pure skill, he was stronger than the most famous of them all, the Sword Star.

“We could?”

“See?”

Seeing Arten nod his head and lower his staff, the emperor relaxed and sheathed his sword.

The friend in front of him was a very excellent talent. Disregarding his title as the strongest magician in the imperial palace he also dealt with all sorts of the imperial family’s problems big and small, a splendid talent that could even do the emperor’s work for him!

So from now and in the future, he would need to work hard for him-no, the empire.

If only for the sake of his free time!

“Haa... since you’ve already gone and done it, it can’t be helped.”

“There we go, that’s my buddy.”

“Your friend’s specialties are giving up quickly and sorting out messes.”

“Alright then. Now. The demonstrations.”

“Do we need to just call it a riot and beat them down again?”

Looking at Arten who sighed as he lifted up his staff, and the emperor who brushed the sheath of his sword, there was only one other person that was beside the emperor who had been listening in on the entire conversation.

As the substitute for the imperial family’s personal knight order’s captain who was currently on duty protecting the Crown Prince, the vice-captain of the imperial knight order who was there for the first time thought.

‘Is the empire really going to be alright like this!’

As a loyal subject of the empire, he began to sincerely worry about the empire’s future.



“The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime!”

-Owner, owner. Even if no one's around don't make it obvious that owner's crazy. I'm blushy blushy.

“Even I wouldn't want to hear I'm crazy from you.”

I lightly retort back to the metal bat as I stuffed magic stones into a bag with dimensional storage magic.

If you wondered where we were, then answering would be human nature!

The cave where I chucked those trainees into!

Retrieve all the magic stones from here first, then move back to my office and destroy the important documents.

From there I can collect the important gear and items and either gap it from the empire, or operation dark under the lantern, I need to think which one I'll be using.

Ah that reminds me. I haven't done something important.

“Hello, juniors?”

“Wanna get hit?”

“No sir!”

When I lifted the metal bat in front of the homunculi that were still holding JoXX poses as always they immediately bowed down.

As expected of existences that had the memories of my former disciples.

“The promised contract is over. Ah, except you.”

With those words the figures turned wavy and vanished into the silver.

-Damn it, it's finally over.

-I did this seeing the blasted payment and I thought I was gonna die of irritation.

-We can say goodbye to those monsters.

-Haha, goodbye, hell!

-Wait, we're going back to hell though?

-That's our home so that's okay.

"Ah, wait! Take, take me too!"

I heard a grumbling from a doppelganger that was contracted at the same time but I ignored it and collected up the metal.

Even if they look like this they're oddities that were created in the process of making the metal bat.

Although I can see quite significant damage and cracks on them, with a bit of repairs they should be reusable.

"Shut up and for now, turn back to your normal form. Your job's nearly over anyway."

"Really? Really?"

"Really."

I packed away the other one that faded wavily back to its normal form, and once I opened the hidden passage that led to my office, hm? Hello?

"Was there still some bastards left?"

Kang!

A sword's flying my way?

Chapter 22

And So The Story Begins (6)

#6 Their story: the story of the hero(air) that gets pretty much no more screentime until he gets called a hero.

“Kuaaak!”

“No, no...”

“Hiik!”

Pathetic sounds of despair are coming from our mouths. Even that No.1000’s taking horrified steps backwards.

As that hand rose ever so slightly No.17 screamed and used the Blink magic she learned purely for evasion to use me as a shield.

“Damn it!”

Ahhh. Instructor, instructor!

I was foolish. The instructor was not a devil but an angel! When are you coming back?!

“Hoho, if you’re going to stay so defensive then you’ll have a hard time? And although I’m saying this again, even if this thing is barely guardable against, the moment you meet the metal bat even guarding is impossible, you know?”

We couldn’t run from the devil that approached us with a smile.

Even if he says that, that bat alone is a struggle to block. The moment it makes contact my sword ki is disrupted and an unrejectable pain comes riding up my sword into my body.

If that devil is right and there’s a higher level weapon above that thing then how the hell are you supposed to block that?!

“Kuurk, everyone dodge!”

“Damn it Surtr, block it!”

The one that was resummoned every time the cooldown time on the summon ran out, the one that was once an archdevil but was now a simple meat shield, Surtr, came out.

“Don’t, don’t come! Don’t come near me you evil god’s apostle!”

Even Surtr with his giant crimson body was shaking in fear. Even his face is paling white.

To think it would even force an archdevil from hell into submission! This thing has already long surpassed the devil’s weapon.

“Hoho, mister archdevil. Why are you acting like that, you’re cramping your style.”

-Kuaaaaaaaghh!

Ahh... Surtr was desummoned while screaming in pain.

Even if we treat him like the local runt he’s still one of the famous archdevils of hell.

And that being was desummoned in a single hit!

“What a weak meat shield. In our era we threw our nearby comrades, because of that I got hit a lot since I was the weakest.”

“Hiik!”

“Da, damn it!”

The devil smiled as he lightly swung the bat around. But No.1000, why are you looking at us like that. You’re not thinking of throwing us at him all of a sudden right?

Gulp.

I swallow dryly as my body quivered in fear. True, there’s no way that all three of us can survive.

Someone needs to take a beating so the other two can survive.

And the most important thing is... that said one person just needn’t be me...

“Coordinate Transfer?”

Eh?

“So you’re the sacrifice?”

“Number Seventteeeeeeeeeennn!”

“I still haven’t forgotten about that day! So make it up with your body!”

Damn it, what problem was she doing this to me for? Is it that? The time at the very beginning where I chained her up because I wanted to eat? Was she still remembering that?

“Justice served.”

“Uiiiiiiik!”

Seeing the hand rise up I lifted my sword. But even if I block that the shock is sent straight through into me, and the moment my legs give out in pain, game over.

A desperate situation.

To I who was waiting for the hour of pain to come again, a ray of light came to me.

-Pshewwwww. Bang!

“Eh? If it’s red then that’s a 1st class emergency.”

Seeing the red lights light up the sky the devil’s face hardened.

He put his hand down and said.

“Training cancelled. We’re all running away to the instructor’s office.”

Run? No, before that...

“Is the instructor’s office a place to run away to?”

Normally you’d think the normal place to run to would be something like an escape path or a hidden tunnel, but to the instructor’s office?

"I guarantee it. The instructor's office is the safest."

The devil said in response to my question, and also added the explanation that it was "the unknown land which not even Sia has managed to venture into."

Although the other two don't seem to know who Sia is, but remembering that that name belonged to the Intelligence Agency's vice-director I nodded.

Ah, come to think of it I've broken into the instructor's personal quarters once, haven't I?

"Are there similar installations to what are in the instructor's room?"

"Ah, so you've been into the instructor's room? Then that makes it simpler. The instructor spends more time in his office than in his room, so the defenses in his office are stronger."

Wow. His room was bad enough but his office is worse. Just what the heck did the instructor do in his office?

With those questions in mind, when we went into the office the devil started fiddling around the office.

With a few movements that carried the ease of long practice, starting from metal shutters coming down over the windows, and I heard something click and lock with a screech.

"Now, this place is probably the safer than the room of the boss of the organization."

"Have the functions been activated?"

"Indeed. And this space is filled with special dwarven-made traps. Now all we have to do is look for the escape route that the instructor made somewhere around here."

"Dwarven-made?! You mean that contraptions that might be used in the imperial palace are installed here?"

"Ah, that's just because the instructor is an honorary elder among the dwarves so that's nothing to be surprised about."

"That's the thing we should be the most surprised about?!"

As No.17 said horrified, I was horrified too.

What kind of race are the dwarves!

The emperor's throne is dwarven made, the Sword Star's sword is dwarven made, and rumour is that some noble plans to gift a dwarven weapon for the duke's birthday to suck up to him! Dwarves, the targets of many a rumour!

But the majority of them are lies!

Meeting a dwarf is hard enough, meaning to get a weapon from them is even exponentially harder!

And somehow the instructor is a honorary elder.

What does it mean to be an Elder of the dwarves?

Even the dwarven king is selected by these elders, and consisting of no more than 36 even when all 12 tribes are gathered together, it's the highest title among the dwarven race.

And throughout history there has been no one from another race that had the title of honorary elder, and a human of all things is one!

And that kind of talent was hiding in an evil organization!

Just what the heck did the instructor used to do?!

But it seemed that our horror was of no cause for concern to the devil and No.1000.

Pretending to listen to us the devil searched the bookshelves, pushing the buttons beneath the desk, and sometimes jumping up and down on the floor, No.17 broke out of her shock and asked.

"Dev... no, temporary instructor, what do you think has happened?"

"Uwaak!"

"Oh, sorry. For the record, some traps could activate so be sure to dodge them."

No.17's immediately ducked down away from the arrows that were shot at her without warning, and at the same time the floor underneath me vanished.

“Wait, isn’t it dangerous?”

“I said that something had happened earlier, didn’t I? The signal flare we saw was a code red, if it’s code red then that means the empire’s army has invaded. If we don’t run away as soon as possible then our lives are in danger.”

For a moment I wanted to tell him to stop because my life wasn’t in danger, but if I did I’d probably die to the bat first.

No, I’d want to die instead.

“Don’t we have to fight if the empire’s army comes at us?”

“Are you stupid. If we fight head on against the empire then no matter how much we’re the empire’s strongest evil organization then even we’re completely screwed as well. Especially if they come charging in without warning then we’re even worse off.”

“How come?”

“Would you leave the useful kids to play guard dog or send them out on missions to earn money? There’s no way that a coward that would hide their strongest weapons at home would become the empire’s strongest evil organization. If you’re the strongest weapon then you should roll a lot like a strongest weapon and earn some money so the organization keeps rolling.”

Seeing the empty space where I used to be and the countless spears that were under it, the devil clicked his teeth and continued.

“Well if you’re truly loyal to the organization no one’s going to stop you going out to fight, but since I was just sold here as a slave, I’m just working for the fat paycheck. To be honest it did prick at my conscience enough to make me consider running away, but if the organization chases after me, especially the instructor holding this thing here in my hand then I’d have no chance which is why I’m staying here, you know? So if the organization goes down then I’m good. Well if it’s the information you’re worried about then right now our peers will be doing their best to burn it all.”

As I imagined the instructor chasing after me with the bat in hand I immediately understood how he felt.

“Did the devil have a conscience?”

As I internally agreed with No.17’s words which she muttered so that I could only barely hear them, I continued talking.

“Then isn’t running away better? If we waste time here and can’t find the escape tunnel isn’t it the end?”

“No, looking for the escape route is safer.”

No matter what happens, it’s not the end for me so I don’t care.

Or rather hurrah for the empire’s troops charging in!

I’m so damn happy that this hell of a lifestyle is finally over!

‘Hm, but wasn’t this a secret mission?’

All of a sudden I had a bad feeling about this.

Surely my damn brothers wouldn’t send in a spy to kill me discreetly and come stab me yelling die foul villain! Right?

As I started thinking one, two unhappy thoughts at a time came flowing in.

And my unhappy predictions were way more accurate than happy ones, weren’t they?

“No.17, No.1000 let’s hurry and search!”

“Ye, yes?”

“Alright.”

I followed the devil and started poking around here and there.

As for why daggers come flying from the ceiling when I open the drawers and why magic is fired at me when I open a book, let’s not care about that.

It’s that instructor that made all this anyway, and in that case these things would be all the more natural.

The moment I thought that I heard a boom and very anxiety-inducing sound coming from under our feet.

Kugugugudoom~

“What’s that sound?”

“Is it the empire’s army already?”

“No, even if it was the empire they can’t break through the dwarven-made magic coating on the room that easily.”

But unlike the devil’s words, the thumping sound started getting closer and closer to us.

In the end at the sound that were only seconds apart from each other we had no choice but to draw our weapons.

Kang!

“Ah damn it, is this the hidden boss’s safe house or something? Why is it so damn hard to get through?”

In a tense state we looked at the person that entered.

The person that came in in a grump was a beauty that seemed slightly older than us.

But I knew perfectly well who this woman with green hair and slim face looking like she was in her mid-twenties better than anyone else.

Moreover, that age and slim personality that didn’t match at all with that slender face of hers!

“Sword Star?!”

“Host club regular?!”(1)

At the same time I yelled out the name I knew the devil beside me said a different name.

“What?”

“Regular?”

For a moment the devil’s and my eyes met. Host regular? The Sword Star?

At that moment.

“Eh? That was a secret.”

Chill.

The bloodthirst that tightened in the air in an instant. In the center of it all was the Sword Star.

“Do. I. Have. To. Kill. You?”

What the hell for?! Because I said she was the Sword Star? Or the host regular?! Or both?

In my horrified state I calculated my chances of victory.

None.

I had no way to defeat that filthy personality with a cute face only. Damn it! Am I going to die here?!

“Wa, wait!”

How did I survive this long! I survive in all sorts of magic bombardments, in the mountains, the seas, the desert!

Plus I threw away my pride as a son of a duke for food, only barely retained my dignity as a human! And I even endured against the bat’s pain!

But at the last I’m going to be silenced to hide the fact that the Sword Star is a host regular! Is there a more bullshit death than that! I need to survive even if I have to reveal my identity!

“I’m, the Raina...”

Drrrrrrrrr.

The moment I was about to beg for my life using my family’s name, the bookshelf beside the desk started making a weird noise.

What was that?

“Was there still some remaining?”

As she said that sword aura started forming on the Sword Star’s sword as if it was perfectly natural.

‘Ah, as expected of the Sword Star?’

One of the strongest swordsmen in history.

The one called the star of the sword.

Even if it’s the instructor there’s no way he could win against that.

And that’s what I’d thought...

With the drrr sound the bookshelf swung open and the instructor.

“Hwaaaaaa?”

Is just casually beating up the Sword Star?

Chapter 23

And So The Story Begins (7)

Kang!

-Hwahaha! It's a really rare ^{feeling} feewing!

A heavy impact that echoed through my hand the moment I blocked. For a second I thought that I'd picked the wrong opponent, but it was the same for the opponent.

"Hwwaat?"

-Hak, I didn't even hit her and such a good scream! That's exactly my type! Ownerowner! Hit her again!

Neither I or its creators know how, but somehow the bat series had an 'impossible to block' attribute imbued into it.

Swords, spears, shields, no matter what weapon or armour you're holding, when you're hit by the bat series then even if you block the pain still goes up your weapon into you.

Although I wouldn't know because I don't know what it feels like. Ah, for the record it might seem like something obvious, but the penetration damage of the metal bat is higher than the regular bat.

"Wha, what the hell is this?"

The woman whose sword I blocked had a stupefied expression on her face.

She probably doesn't understand what happened to her.

Sorry but since I don't understand either I can't explain it to you.

Hoho, but if you look at her appearance alone anyone would think she's a beauty.

Although most men can't keep themselves in control in front of a pretty woman, I'm different.

Because I've seen a lot of beauties in my time. And by and large every single one of them were crazy bitches.

Even with just cases close to me you have the princess and the high elf, and among my disciples you have Sia, No.17 and No.1000.

If the net's widened a bit further, you have the noble girls fighting over Rein as well.

And therefore beauty = high likelihood of a crazy bitch as the majority.

This is definite fact!

Don't believe me? Then look!

There's no way that a girl swinging her sword around that well smack in the middle of an evil organization would ever be normal!

"Hwaaah? Wh, what is this? Why am I hurting when I'm the one attacking?"

I block each and every heavy strike with the metal bat. The more attacks I block the lighter the attacks come.

The first strike almost made me drop the metal bat, but now it's about the level where it's not too hard to defend against.

And in particular the important part of the body for swordsmen, the legs are also definitely shaking as they're near-failing to keep her body upright. Normally I would switch to attacking from here and end it, but at the sword ki that's getting brighter and brighter on her sword I kept my defensive stance.

-Hak. Owner. I hurt too. It hurts but it feels good. Is, is this how it felt for the others I beat up? It's a new feewing. Owner, what do I do? At this rate I'm gonna be a maso!

-Please just, shut up.

But, I don't think I can hold out with this defensive stance forever.

Damn it. If in the worst sadist also becomes a masochist then the mental pollution has a very high likelihood of having a very critical negative influence on my mentality.

A tiny blessing here would be that it's voice setting is a little girl's, if it was panting with the voice of a mature noonim(2) then it would have been dangerous as hell. In many ways.

-Hwaah! Hit, and be hit! Give and receive pain! This is the realm of gods! A perfect union where I can't tell whether I the hitting side was the M, or I the one getting hit was the M! The pleasure is only getting better!

-Please shut up!

-Hauuu! More, abuse me more!

Ah damn it. Were the settings misset or something. The sounds that would 100% summon Podori(1) for sure if they weren't only audible in my head echoed in my brain.

This emergency situation where the ultimate S was becoming the ultimate M was slowly tightening the noose around my neck!

But thankfully, whether due to the accumulation of shock or otherwise, the enemy's concentration is dropping by the second. Now's about the time she'd start up a big skill.

"Uuuu... Please, die!"

"No.17 push the desk behind you, Rein you hit the wall beside you!"

"Yes!"

The sword ki became a sword aura. The enemy is a swordsmaster that even a peasant would instantly be promoted to at least baron for! Thinking that I would die if I relaxed even for a bit, I commanded my disciples that were staring dumbly at me and Rein who was between them.

"Too late!"

"You are the one that's too late."

"What?"

A strong attack is headed my way but this is my home ground!

Even the local mongrel keeps half his bowl in his own kennel, in my own office I will claim no less than double!

With a ping the floor the Sword Star was standing on shot up. Bed is a science, and the life of a bed is springs! The specially crafted springs that the dwarven craftsmen crafted for me are the world's greatest!

As the floor sprang unexpectedly upwards the enemy's sword aura missed my by far. But, as expected of a swordsmaster!
Even in that situation she regained her balance and engaged with a follow up.

Fhit!

"What kind of room is thiiiiiiiiss?!"
"It's dwarven-made."

But the enemy's sword was held down by the daggers flying at her from the sides, and arrows flying at her from the front and behind.

As expected of Made in Black Anvil!

The greatest service with guaranteed customer satisfaction.

But the enemy was skilled as well.

She immediately retracted her strike in mid-air, and the caliber of her defensive work was nothing short of magnificent. And therefore since I can get fucked over, the moment I slammed the metal bat into her side a distinctly different scream from the others I've heard so far entered my ears.

"Fuweeeeet?"

-Owner, owner! Now's the chance!
-I know too.

"Fu, hwaaaaah! Wha, what are you doing?! Stop, stop!"
"Tha, that's!"

I smacked her wrist that was about to hold up a sword and knocked away her sword,

otherwise known as a swordsman's life far far away.

And as I gripped the metal bat's grip with my right hand and the head with my left, Rein started, appalled and began shivering in fear.

-Twin Baton Style!

The metal bat that turned hazy for a moment, amazingly separated into two identical batons that were slightly thinner than normal.

-My name is Aru!

-My name is Cardia!

-And combined, we're the goddess Arcadiaaaaaaaaaa!

-Shut up!

But the noisiness too was double!

Of course there wasn't the worse-case development where its consciousness actually split into two, but if I keep separating it, it can also bullshit twice as much so I can't split it that often.

"Now, then."

"No, no!"

"You need a beating."

"Hwaaaah, no, no! Save, save me! Please! No, it hurts... waaaaaaaaa!"

-Heheehee these're good cries!

-Haang! Where d'ya think you're running Girl~(3) you can't run away from this unni!

Starting from the first hit, her resistance seemed to vanish and how she was flailing around pathetically crawling around on the floor to not get hit.

Not that she could get away anyway.

"Why did you come to the organization? And why are you here?"

"Fuwaaang... no, no... stop..."

"If you don't talk I'll keep hitting you."

"Hiiik! Old, old man Nermia said he'd give me a magic sword so he told me to come pick up his granddaughter! I, I talked so don't hit meeeeeee!"

I turned my head as I diligently tenderised her with the metal bat, when my line of sight and No.17's met she flinched before shuffling two steps back.

If it's Nermia then it's that place. The place I went to in the past that was the most famous family in the Empire for magic.

As you'd expect from a prestigious magic family, their magic defenses were very very solid, but I just ignored them all and very very easily emptied them out and left, and she's their granddaughter?

"No.17, explain."

"Ye, yes! I am the Nermia house's daughter sent to retrieve the family's seal that was stolen from us, Ria el Nermia!"

Perhaps it's because she's a smart girl, she understood very well what I wanted from her.

But she's revealing it a bit too quickly...

"Rein, explain."

"Yes, the empire's army is currently invading our headquarters and the organization is at the brink of total destruction. So we were planning to run away, but the Sword Star appeared all of a sudden, but you arrived and subdued her."

As expected of my ex-disciple. He understands me very well. But, Sword Star? What kind of bullshit is this.

"Sword Star, this?"

"Hwaaaah! You, you said you'd stop hitting me!"

As I pointed at the woman who was crying with every strike and frantically trying to guard her head with both hands with the metal bat, Rein nodded.

Meaning that this woman is the Sword Star? Then that means No.17's very simply confessed while the Sword Star was getting the crap beaten out of her.

But she's the real Sword Star. In that case.

“Wha, why!”

“Because you’re the Sword Star.”

I need to hit her.

It’s the Sword Star. (劍星) Meaning the one who shines the brightest of the swordsmen of the age, so Sword Star.

Normally in novels they use the character for saint after sword, but in this place they use the character for star instead.

As the one that receives the most attention of the five swordsmen that represent the strongest in the continent, these five always fight over rank 1, 2 among swordsmen.

Well since Sword Heaven was the one who understood the sword the best, the Sword Elder (劍尊) who represents head of the strongest military organization, and the Magic Sword(魔劍) is too far removed from normal swordsmanship so the only other one that could contest the title is the Sword King (劍帝)

Even so, the name of the title implies that the holder is has the brightest skill among all swordsmen in the continent, and since the sword-happy folk that always live and die by their pride keep picking fights with the current Sword Star for this title, and the current holder’s retained this title fifteen long years and...

-Haakhaak... how’s unni’s hands?

-You’re cute when you cry!

This is a good chance. There’s an opportunity to shut these noisy brats up!

-This girl, forties.

-E, uweeh?

-Tha, that can’t be true! Our cutie’s in her forties! You, you’re lying owner?

-It’s the truth.

-Hwaaaaah! My, return my purity!

-This, this can’t be!

Ignoring the despairing metal bat I keep beating up the Sword Star. I heard cries of [I, I don’t want old aunties!], [Ow, owner, I like the tears of cute little girls, I don’t want

the tears of forty-year old spinsters!], but since if I let her go there's no telling whether she'd cleave me and the building into two so I can't just let go a danger like that.

From the rumours I also heard that she had the most overwhelming amount of mana among all Sword Stars to date.

I've heard rumours of that too. The legend that during the great war, she sliced an entire castle wall with a ten-metre long sword aura and immediately got an unconditional surrender.

"Huht. Why, stop hitting me... it hurts!"

"Do you have any more information?"

But I need to get information first. Should I get it and kill her straight afterwards?

But since this kid is a 1st class living weapon of the imperial family, if I kill her then the imperial family will come chasing after me. But since the princess is chasing me anyway does it matter then?

"I, I know him, too!"

As soon as the Sword Star's shaking eyes made contact with No.1 she barely lifted her shaking hand and pointed at No.1.

"I am Raina rel Swin, the direct line of the Raina ducal line. Unlike No.17, I was forced here by my brothers with bullshit logic saying it was for the emperor, but in reality since they just didn't want to finish me off with their own hands they sent me to Howling as a death sentence. In other words, unlike No.17 I have absolutely no objective whatsoever!"

"Oi, oi!"

"Why are you dragging me into this!"

"Such a pity. There's no more information worth hearing from you."

"No, noooooo!"

-I don't wanna toooooo!

-Saaaaaaaameee!

No.17 rushed over to No.1 who very quickly explained himself and started shaking him by his lapels but I ignored them, and to do my job I started drumming the Sword

Star, but both the Sword Star and the metal bat are screaming. But moreover. The hell? All my damn disciples are the empire's spies. What kind of bullshit is this. Then perhaps.

"No.1000. explain."

"Yes?"

Looking at No.1000 tilt her head I realised that No.1000 really was nothing special.

If this girl was a spy of the empire then that would have meant that the empire was at the verge of ruin.

A spy that seemed like she'd spill all if you fed her.

There's no way that kind of thing would exist?

"Hwaa... no, please... Stop..."

It seems the Sword Star's body is hitting her limits. I call that state where you can only shiver while repeating the same thing over and over again the blank slate state.

That phenomenon can be observed when the metal bat's blessing have reached their limits in the body and the blessings no longer affect them so only the pain is registered, and so their mind goes blank. Hm, this should be fine.

"Then..."

"Hiiik!"

As I turned my head No.1 and No.17's heads turned sheet white.

Normally I would dispose of traitors, but the organization's already abandoned me, no? I can't afford to make more enemies for nothing.

From here I need to press a favourable image, and use these kids as bait.

"No.1, you have no objective, and No.17 your goal is the Nermia family's seal. Correct?"

"I, I don't need it! Tha, that seal we can just recarve it!"

"Ye, yes!"

Looking at the convulsing mess of the Sword Star in the corner the only thing left in these two kids' eyes is fear. Very good. They should listen to me well then. But having said that, the Nermia family's seal.

-Owner, didn't ya melt it down to make me?

-No, I looted the Nermia family after you were made.

So I probably haven't melted it down. Since most of the time the seals of high-ranking houses are made with precious metals I normally switched them out during missions and melted them down for other projects, but I haven't made anything special after looting the Nermia family.

I probably, still have it? Not like it matters if I don't. She said they could carve out another one after all. Not like it's my fault either.

"The organization has already abandoned us."

More accurately just me, but master and disciple always share the same fate.

"And thus we are escaping the organization. Rein, you take these kids and escape early."

"What do we do with that?"

"That" which he pointed with his finger, I thought a bit while looking at the Sword Star that had started drooling, but it can't be helped.

"Take her for now."

"Isn't she dangerous?"

"If she seems suspicious then clobber her with that."

"Yes, sir."

This kid, how long has it been since I gave him the bat and he's already showing such a strong faith in it.

But since it's the Sword Star it might get dicey with just the wooden bat but I didn't say anything. Although it might be tough to tank a sword aura, it'll last against sword ki at least.

"I, will go looking for this kid's seal."

“In, instructor!”

For a moment No.17 makes a face as if she was deeply moved. Sorry, I stole that. So don't make that kind of face. You're hurting my conscience.

-Master with a conscience? Sounds like the World Tree would fall before that!

-In that case it's already fallen though.

-Haang, it got dirtied! That's right! My little sister was made with the world tree! My little sister got dirtied!

As I said while pointing towards the bat, the metal bat started and began shouting. Although if you're really going to do the math, the bat's date of birth is before the metal bat, but this kid always argues that she's the elder sister.

“Now, get moving.”

“Yes, sir.”

I told Rein the escape route and went to find the seal. Ah, before that.

“I need to destroy the organization.”

Fair's fair after all. Since you lot betrayed me first it's not my fault?

Chapter 24

And So The Story Begins (8)

“Hahaha, it’s burning well.”

-Owner, owner! I know that you’re evil enough that if I called you a son of a bitch then I’d probably be offending all other four-legged dogs out there, but isn’t this a bit too far?

“The organization was the one that betrayed me first.”

-No, I know that. But why do the neighbouring buildings explode when owner pushes a few buttons in ya room? Did you make these because the organization betrayed ya too? Did owner have the ability to turn a building into a bomb in an hour or something?

Hey hey, how noisy you are! For moments like this you have. Boop

Boom!

-... Wow, if I’m right, isn’t that the place where all the organization’s big shots’re at? Weren’t owner’s past disciples in that building as well?

“You know one but not the other.”

-What’s this serious tone all of a sudden. So whazza thing that I don’t know then?

“There’s no way that my disciples wouldn’t bail from the organization when it’s about to fall!”

-Hang, big achievement!

“Because I raised my disciples to be strong!”

-What’s that got to do with this?

“Defecting always makes you stronger!”

Just why does that one with the reaaaally great personality, the Hidden Leaf Village’s Ixxchi so strong! Because he was a defector ninja!

Defection always makes people stronger. To begin with, defection means to leave an organization, and always if someone defects then the organization in question sends out agents to capture the defector.

Meaning that to defect also means to be pursued, and to survive you need to get stronger!

No, when you defect in the first place, you need to be strong enough to shake off the ones holding you down and run away to be able to defect to begin with!

Either way, latter or former, one who defects is also one who is strong and since I raised my disciples to be strong, they will naturally have defected.

Any rascal that’s loyal to the organization has not the qualifications to be called my disciple!

-Ownerowner. Enough with the bullshit. We need to run too.

“Yes, we just need to open the last safe anyway.”

-The safe I was in? It was so cramped in there so it was awful.

As I continued to ignore the metal bat’s mutterings that it didn’t smell that great either, the air circulation was poor, if there was air circulation in a safe then that’s the problem.

The fact that you can get airflow means that there’s a hole present, no? A safe just needs to protect items well.

“Lily. Lily. Hm. That’s also a lily, this is a lily.”

-And my preference is also for lily!(1)

“Shut up.”

-Hwiiiing, respect my preferences!

I don't know where it learned that bullshit, but I ignored the noisy metal bat and kept looking for an insignia with a lily, but problem was I found eight lilies alone.

"There's a bloody lot of them."

-It's because owner stole a bloody large amount of seals! Whassis? It looks like there's at least 50 of them? Are there that many nobles in the empire?

"There's a bloody lot of them, too."

Although there's a fixed number of dukes and marquis, the number of counts are a fair bit.

Of course there aren't that many counts that are recognised as true high nobility, but the number of counts have increased along with the empire's land.

And there's a disgustingly large number of viscounts and barons. Especially in the cases of barons in particular, most of them don't hold any land and are just some slightly promoted merchants, and the majority of the knights hold a baron title.

Although there are some nations that give tax immunity to their nobility, that Karuan Empire's nobles pay more tax the higher rank they are, so they often half-force on a baron title to rip off anyone who might be the tiniest bit rich.

If you don't take it? Then you get taken away for treason for ignoring the emperor's orders. And all your wealth is confiscated as well. So you have no choice but to take it.

As expected of that princess's father. That bloodline has something sleeping it that just can't be ignored.

Perhaps it's because it's a dragon's bloodline. They've all got an innate talent for ripping people off.

But because of that my income is good. The higher ranked nobles use rare metals or engravings of magic spells in their seals, but those who can't get those, the majority of the viscounts and lower just flaunt extravagance to show off how rich they are.

I have no idea why on earth you would use expensive jewels on a stamp, but thanks to that my funds are plentiful so I guess I have to be thankful for that. Well, pick up the

lilies, put the rest in another pocket.

Since most of my work here is done, I've arrived at my escape route number 11, and what I need to do here is obviously!

"Now then, I need to blow that up too."

-My owner's a terrorist! A terrorist that even blows up his own house!

That's right, my name is Naruan! A former agent of the organization, the one who commands explosives! Signature move, exp... Boop.(2)

Boom!

"Farewell, my home, my workplace."

-Jobless. My owner is jobless! Unemployment in middle age, how are we going to eat now sobsob...

"For a chunk of metal what do you care about eating?"

The explosion I could hear from above my head was satisfactory.

Normally burning all the important and private information is the normal thing to do but I'm busy so I can't take the time to do that.

As they say, explosion is art!(3)

Now all I have to do is use Rein as bait and escape!

#7 Their story: A certain former host's story.

It's the end.

"Hm? Rein? Where's Master?"

The one coming from far away over there with a smile, is the craziest bitch I've ever met in my short life, that Sia, right? And she's smiling that brightly?

The only times I've seen her smile like that were when she had completely lost it with anger, when she'd lost it with a beating by the metal bat, or when she'd lost it after staring at the instructor for too long.

Well at the end of the day they were all times that she'd lost it, but look at the evidence.

Her direct subordinates were all two, three steps away from her.

"Why are you..."

"Oh my, there's no way that I wouldn't be present where Master is?"

At her smile that became brighter than before, I, my juniors, and the Intelligence Agency officers all unconsciously took a step backwards.

No wait, while the organization is in the middle of its downfall, how the hell did you predict the instructor would come this way?

"The instructor isn't here?"

"He'll probably come soon, right?"

"May, maybe."

"Oh my, my lovable dear classmate, why are you shaking like that... huh?"

As Sia came up to me my feet were naturally moving backwards.

Th, the crazy bitch is coming closer! And her eyes are on the bat!

"Wow, it's been a while, that."

"Ye, yeah, right?"

"Yeah, it hurt because we were hit by it a lot, but it didn't hurt. It was like Master. Although he looked angry from the front, from behind he was kind where no one could see."

"Re, really?"

To be I just thought that he'd implemented the hardest level out of all the instructors, no out of every agent and personnel in the organization, but no doubt that's not what it was like in this girl's eyes.

Those were the eyes of a lunatic in love that I saw often at the club!

I even knew some hosts that were kidnapped by noble girls who made those very eyes! They're dangerous like nothing else! What else from my peer and the instructor's disciple!

"Hmm~ did Master give you that? He did? He did right?"

"No, because the instructor was away on an assignment, I was assigned to teach these kids temporarily. So I only borrowed it from him. Yep. Only borrowed!"

It's pressuring. Talking with my peer is so damn pressuring! Although my cohorts are all weird one way or another, no one is as pressuring as this girl!

"Ah, those empire spies?"

""Hiik!""

Although the moment her gaze turned their way the kids instinctively took a step back, sorry.

I'm weak so I can't get in her way. To be honest I'm happier that her attention's turned your way.

"Hmm~ the Nermia family and the Raina family. Hm~"

"Si, Sia? But since the empire's troops are charging, there's nothing to be gained from touching these kids, right? Maybe use them as hostages or something, please? The instructor requested me as well..."

But since I had to save the kids so I stepped forward, but Sia revealed a shocking truth to me. The level of the revelations were roughly, the grade of a legendary empire-wide bestseller that a duke's daughter once recommended to me!

It was about as shocking as realising that the child of the enemy household turned your lover was actually your sibling separated at birth!

"Hm? No, I don't care? Well, I wasn't one at first, but now I'm definitely playing for the imperial family."

"Wha?"

"Ah, you probably didn't know? But, among the instructor's disciples there's an oddly high proportion of spies. Since there's six of us from us and the previous cohort. It's over the majority, isn't it?"

"Then you're saying the instructor is also an imperial spy?!"

"Nono, although he does have ties with the empire, those were all made after he got

sent out on a mission for the organization. Well, thanks to that there were people who I thought I could trust to Master, but Master himself is not a spy.”

Instructor, just what kind of kids did you raise?

Even if I have no love for the organization, considering my and the previous cohort that’s 11 people!

6 out of 11? Wait then if you include this cohort as well then 8 out of 14 are spies!

“So, it really doesn’t matter.”

What Sia was muttering under her breath as she answered herself I unfortunately heard loud and clear. “As long as they don’t touch Master...” was what she said!

This girl, empire or whatever, in reality she’s just aiming for the instructor! Is this alright, Empire?!

“So, you said you’ll meet up with Master outside, right? Then wait here.”

But whether she knew of my concerns or not, Sia smiled as brightly as she did before, no, even brighter, and hummed as if she was extremely excited.

“Because I. Will escort him myself~”

Instructor, I pray that we will meet each other in one piece again.



-Ownerowner. Something feels weird.

“True. Something does feel really off.”

-It feels like a ghost’s gonna pop out. Scawy!

“I think even ghosts would fear you.”

Although I don’t know if it would work on ghosts but if it does then mere ghosts! But it might be ineffective so don’t!

“Here was right after all?”

...Sorry. Please bring out the ghosts instead.

“Eh? Master. What’s wrong. What’s with that expression as if you’ve seen a ghost when all you’ve done is see your lovable disciple in front of you?”

No, if I’d just seen a ghost I’d be making a lot easier expression than this.

“What are you doing here.”

But I a veteran poker face master quickly restored my expression and asked coldly. Just what could it be? Is she finally here to stick a sword in my stomach?

Or is she planning to sell me off to the princess and hope for success on both sides?
Or!

“Of course is a lovers’ escape with Master.!”

Are you fucking serious?!

-Heyhey. This girl’s obsessiveness is OP as hell. Dangewus!”

-I know that as well!

Wow, I knew from long ago that this was being oddly clingy towards me, but I didn’t expect this much!

But, are the kids behind you following that crazy bitch? Are you all part of some familia that believes in the goddess of beauty or something?!(4)

“The organization is not ruined yet. Is that not dangerous?”

“Eh? Ah, Master wouldn’t know. The organization is currently completely broken apart. By the hands of Master’s disciples.”

-Whazzis now?

-I have no idea either?!

“Ah, Master didn’t know. Actually over half of Master’s disciples were actually people sent by the empire! There were some that the emperor sent to watch you, some that the princess sent to watch you, some that were just sent to keep an eye on the organization, and there were some that just coincidentally went under your umbrella, but in the end, most of Master’s disciples are actually spies from the empire! Because of that, Zeral and Maren weren’t originally spies but the princess secretly got in

contact with them and they betrayed the organization? Plus your other disciples all ran away the moment the empire came in! Meaning, right now there are none of Master's disciples left in the organization right now!"

Hoho, these lunatics. All the higher ups of the organization either ran or were the empire's spies, and since there're spies from not only my disciples, the organization is already all but over.

-And owner made the remaining bigwigs go boom! So it's really screwed nao!

-It was fated to fall anyway.

-I think it's all owner's fault?

-No, this isn't my fault! The organization, the organization was the problem! Just handing over all the spies to me, what were they thinking?

"Ah, that reminds me the reason why the empire attacked the organization was because the princess wanted to take you in so she was erasing it?"

-Naiiiiled daooooowwn! Because of owner the prestigious and historic evil organization Howling was ruined!

Hoho. Crazy. My former boss decided to ruin my current company because she wanted her subordinate back. No, even before that the only reason I went to my past workplace was because this place sent me there! This place was always my associate workplace!

-Owner. There's way too many nutcases around owner. The imperial princess and your disciples too. If owner gets a girlfriend later then she's totes gonna die stabbed by these kids?

Ah, I will admit that. Including the one who said that, the metal bat, I have no idea why I have so many crazy bastards around me.

What these kids think is love is completely different from what normal people think is love.

No. the princess and Sia! No matter how I do the math I can only see the nice boat ending!(5) Those sorts of things are suitable for Rein, they are not suitable for me!

"Well because of that the organization thought that Master was a spy so they all went

nuts. Since the Crown Prince leading the empire's troops is also due to the princess' request and they went even crazier looking for Master.

So, Master has no choice left but a lovers' escape with me~ if you come now then oh my, a beauty like me as a service! A chance like this doesn't come every day, Master!"

-Wow this is a pretty unni, but she called herself a beauty! Even though she is a beauty! But it's still embawwassing!

"Good terms, but I never thought of you as anything but a disciple."

"It's alright. Because as much as Master doesn't love me, I love Master even more. If you're with me, you'll come to love me in the end!"

Even if the other doesn't love you, you can fill up that gap with your own love, what kind of logic is that!

-What logic. It's the logic of these kids who'll stab another woman if she so much as looks at you. Master can kiss your dreams of marriage goodbye! As if there's anyone else who would accept owner who's marked by a crazy bitch like... there is. Wut, that's weird! It's normal that there shouldn't, but there is! And they're all girls like her! And there isn't just one of them either!

Even as the invincible metal bat was horrified Sia kept drawing ever nearer to me.

"Now, it's finally time for just the two of us alone. Now we leave together far far away with me! Then the princess or whatever won't come looking for us! I've already finished talking with the emperor too! So all you have to do now is leave together with me!"

Even if you say it so confidently, I'm not going!

(1) Lily = 백합 = Yuri = lesbian = no more need be said

(2) Waga na wa Megumin! Archwizard wa nariraitoshi, saikyou no gougeki mahou, bakuretsu mahou omo – alright, yes I butchered it I was typing by ear I'm sorry

(3) Thought to have originally been termed by Deidara of Naruto

(4) Freya Familia, Danmachi. Known for doing, well... not exactly the sanest of things on the order of their goddess.

(5) School Days' Nice Boat ending where the MC's girl got killed and the man himself

got brutally dismembered before the yan ran away with the corpse. Relatively famous, if you're reading this here I don't imagine you'd be unaware of it.

Chapter 25

And So The Story Begins (9)

Madness. Just what the heck did she do to get the emperor to acknowledge an elopement with me?

But aside from the moments when she was getting hit with the bat and metal bat I don't recall her every lying to me?

Let's check first.

"If you lie, you get hit."

"How do you have that cursed magic weapon!"

"I used it when that rascal Rood came."

"I lost a comrade."

"He isn't dead."

"Sometimes people find more solace in death. Getting hit by that magic weapon is one of those moments. Rood would also have preferred you to finish him off cleanly with a sword if for the sake of nothing but old relationships."

Sia said with a hateful look at the metal bat.

"Now, Master! Throw away that useless thing and come with me!"

"I refuse."

-Wow owner! Slightly touched!

"Then you can bring that too..."

"I didn't necessarily refuse just because of this."

-Ahhhhht! Return my emotions!

A life with Sia, I will have to refuse. The organization's gone under as well. I might as well aim for the farming king life I gave up in the past.

"Will I simply give up like that?"

“Probably not.”

“Yes, Master. I will take you with me no matter what.”

Click.

The moment she snapped her fingers, the mood changed.

“To face Master, I thought for a long time. And my answer was numbers and ranged attacks.”

At the same time she said that, torches started to light up the cave one, two at a time. The final count being at least a hundred.

“I brought special poisons that can paralyze even an ogre with so much as a scratch. And the numbers I brought were the most I could muster. Now, Master.”

Why is it that whenever my disciples come to fight me, they always bring a mob with them?

“If you sleep for just a bit, once you wake up all that’s left is to live happily in the home I have prepared for us.”

As Sia slowly drew away with a bright smile, I could hear the sound of hundreds of arrows flying towards me.

But there’s way too many? Is this a death route? She knows perfectly well that I can’t block that if I don’t have mana?

-Wow, prep work OP. She’s owner’s disciple alright! Plus she even said she had a house ready, since owner doesn’t have a home right how in’t that a chance?

-But you’d probably be melted down.

-No, no way!

This rascal still doesn’t know what it’s done.

Sure I was the one laying out the beatings but the tool was this metal bat.

I guarantee it, if it’s Sia then she’ll do something like the movie based off the legendary novel and create a Fellowship of the Bat to throw it in Stioris Volcano that was even said to have melted an archdevil, just to get rid of this rascal from the world somehow.

No matter how much suffering and sacrifices they had to make, if it's Sia then she'll endure it all to melt down the metal bat.

-And so. The moment I fall is also the moment you die!

-Owner and I share the same fate! We're bonded by the strong bond of our souls!

And so that this thing and I can both survive, those arrows need to be blocked!

"Not even Master could parry away all these arrows."

She said loudly from all the way over there.

Sure, normally you wouldn't be able to block these numbers. You'd just get pincushioned and die, right?

But Siaaa?

Did you realise your voice was shaking as you said that? She still has that shard of uncertainty somewhere in her heart.

Well, from an objective point of view, Sia's evaluation of me is correct. To normal swordsmen with high mana, long-distance attacks are poorly effective.

Unless the opponent is a bowmaster or something that can pour in mana into arrows, normal archers have a hard time penetrating through the sword ki of a swordsman with mana. Putting mana into a sword and maintaining it takes massive amounts of effort by itself, so how much harder would it to maintain that mana in an arrow that's flying away from you?

So the role of an archer is, to just beat the crap out of ordinary soldiers, and they don't even work that well against heavy armour either.

But to me without mana, there isn't a weapon deadlier than an arrow.

And because of that, I made very thorough preparations against archers.

"Block it, metal bat!"

-You're making a weak frail girl like me block that scary thing! Owner is a bad man!

If the product of one of best dwarven clans the Black Anvil, the thing that's suspected to be tougher than a Dragon Lord's scales, is weak and frail, then a normal dragon is a tutorial-level monster.

In that case the tutorial is too hard. What is that level which sounds like you'd accidentally go into hell level difficulty and diligently hurt yourself to raise resistances with? (1)

"What!"

Hoho, why are you surprised. There's no such thing as impossible for this metal bat with transform skills that would put a D**to to shame!(2)

The bat wavers and becomes a thin shield in my hand. Even if it's this thin it's still an invincible shield that tanked the hammer strikes of dwarven swordsmaster-class warriors.

And now all that's left is the finisher! The romance of men!

-Fusion!

-Uwah! O, owner and my bodies are becoming oneeeeeeee!

The original purpose in the creation of this thing was as a higher rank weapon than the bat as well as to defend against my weaknesses.

The original goal was to make separate weapons and armour, but due to monetary and material shortages I couldn't do it.

Although it looks like a lump of iron on the outside, it's actually the sole item in existence made of the metal that only appears in dwarven legends, Mithteil. (3)

Mithteil is only made when a mithril mine is hit by a Meteo or a similar impact to be pressurized at insane temperatures.

If I didn't sneak it out together with the princess then I'd never have been able to make this.

And so, since I'm making it anyway, I made it so that it could be used for attacking and defending!

-Ultimate fusion, Arcanaruan!

-What's that childish name.

-Haang, what do you mean childish. This goddess Arcadia even gave it four letters of her name!

All that happened was the metal bat covered my body in a very thin layer like armour from the middle ages, but because of that my defenses have skyrocketed.

And if I use a regular attack in this state then there is a massive bonus damage added on top of that!

Although sure, there's no actual damage that goes through, but since it can render them unable to attack, an armour where offense and defense are one, is this not the perfect armour!

"Were you prepared for this?"

"...I don't think there's anyone aside from Master who would imagine something like that."

Seeing as the arrows just bounced off with no effect, Sia sighed heavily but drew her sword and said.

"Even so, this chance... I can't give it up."

With a serious expression, an overwhelming amount of mana flowed into her sword. A thicker and stronger magic power than sword ki.

-Ohhh! Izza a swordsmaster! A swordsmaster! Even the kingdom next door doesn't have more than ten of them!

-Ah, I killed a lot of them last time so there's only three left. And even then two of them only awoke at the last second.

Swordsmaster.

I did see her on the verge of breaking through at the end of training, but to think she could so perfectly master it.

As a teacher I am so happy... my ass. A swordsmaster's chasing after me so if I'm happy about that then I'm a pervert!

"All units, cleared for close quarter combat. As long as you don't kill him you are free to use any means and method available!"

Sword ki and sword auras began to form on everyone's swords. If sword ki is pouring mana into the sword, what they call aura is adding even more energy and compressing it. To a beginner they might look like the same thing, but in reality it's the difference between heaven and earth if you face it.

-But neither of those does anything to this boddyyyyy!

But it can't leave the tiniest scratch on the metal bat's armour.

"You, you mean that not even sword aura works on that thing?!"

-Take this, Aru-chan finisher, tentacle attack!

"Hiiik!"

Sure even if it's the metal bat, even if I've thrown in legendary metals like they were scraps you do leave scratches if it keeps getting hit by sword aura. It might even get cut if it's hit often enough. But, like I've said before, this metal bat can change shape freely like a D**to.

That means, whether it's scratched, or cut, it can be put back together! And automatically! And on top of that as a passive it reflects the enemy's attacks!

And like it's perverted personality, the long wavy tentacle attack that comes from the left arm is a freebie!

"Ma, Master? I think something perverted came out of your arm!"

"That's something the metal bat made on its own so I can't help with that."

"This, this cursed magic weapon!"

"Kuaaaaak!"

-Haang, where do you think you're going pretty unni? Wiiiin? What's this dirty man! I wouldn't know if you were a cute boy, but since it's a promised loss if I take off that mask so for the sake of my sanity I'll just abandon you!

The people that had been chasing after Sia were all defeated by the metal bat's tentacle attack and were pathetically thrown aside.

"Do, don't run away!"

"But, but how do we!"

"Kurk! I, I can't dodge!"

-Hiya! Ayap! I don't need men! Unless you're a pretty boy then git lost! My goal is that tasty-looking unni! This unni will dote on unni a lot!

-So just who's supposed to be the unni again...

To do some work as well, I formed a sword in my right hand, but the left hand's tentacle defeats the enemy before they even come near. Autoattacking even as I'm standing still. It is convenient but...

-How much mana do you have?

-Haang, I don't worry about afterwards! That's this Arcadia's cweed!

-I do have to worry about afterwards though?

Even though the metal bat recharges by itself, it has its limits.

And what if, that mana ran out? The defenses of metal bat is done, at the same time I'm also done for.

The only things left are a nice boat or imprisonment end, just those two.

-Then, for owner! Ultimate Hundred Tentacle Violator attaaaack!

"Ku, kuaaak!" "Block it!"

"Kuaaak, the damage comes through even if we block iiiiiiiittt!"

"Dodge! I, I'm done for..."

"Master! Just what the heck did Master create!"

What was in my field of vision was seriously around a hundred or so tentacles sprouting from my left hand and people getting violated by those left and right. And Sia who was horrified at the sight.

Sorry, I don't know what I made either. Nor do I want to know.

-Haang, what owner made is of course the beautiful goddess, Arcadia! You don't have to be embarrassed! If you're embarrassed then you lose owner!

-Then I will become a loser today! After losing I will gain the freedom to be embarrassed!

-Haang, owner can't be honest.

Now the faceless masked assassins are mostly down for the count. Facing me was Sia who was glaring at me while biting down on her red lips.

"Do you really hate me that much? To bring out that monstrosity!"

-Monstrosity! This unni's been treating me really awfully for a while now?

"Hate... I don't hate you. But I don't like you either. Just a cute disciple overflowing with personality. That's what I think of you."

-You're the student, I'm the teacher! And I'm the punishment tool in between! The three of us are tied by the schoolyard string of fate! So don't hate meee, pretty unni!

Ignoring the declaration that casually pushed everyone's school years into hell, Sia was shaking with her head bowed down at my words. Just what is she feeling I wonder?

Shame? Embarrassment? If she was a normal woman she'd be crying having had her passionate proposal rejected...

-Embarrassed because she was rejected?

-Like my disciples would ever be like that.

Her subordinates are all down, close combat is impossible. If there was anything she could do then...

"After I parted from Master, the contract I managed to make, great goddess of hell, Styx. Master."

-Owner, owner? Those eyes are dangerous! Really dangerous you know? Eyes are all spinny spinny? It looks like she'll run at us to die together? The contracted goddess is the goddess of hell!

"Master. No matter what Master says I can't give up on you. So..."

Yep. I think I know what's coming.

"Together with me."

-According to the will of my contractor.

God. Existences that can be compared among hell's archdevils among summons. Another world's absolute beings...

"On you go."

-Die... Kuaaaaaaaaaht?!

Kang!

-Haang, this world's only goddess is me, the one and only Arcadia!

"...Eh?"

Was blown away with a crisp sound.

"Desummoned? A god? In one hit? Urrk."

Whether she received a critical mental hit, I hit Sia's stomach while she was stunned.

"Bad... man..."

"Once you wake up you will already be at your house."

"...ster's... Not wi..."

She was muttering something but she couldn't take the following strike and passed out.

-Owner, what're you going to do? Kill'em all?

-I don't kill my disciples.

-Ho? Was owner a kind of person someone who cared about that?

-I am that kind of person.

-Owner is a person! I thought you were a devil at least!

Although to save this noisy child's mana I want to undo the transformation, but just in

case of a final strike, there could be agents lying in ambush so I should go out like this for now.

Because just when I exit I could have the princess waiting for me with thousands of soldiers saying “I was waiting for you!” or the organization’s boss that I’ve never seen before with bloodshot eyes yelling “Because of you, our thousand-year history of Howling is!” could be waiting for me.

-Weiiing? Someone’s there!

Look here! Is there not already something on the metal bat’s radar!

I’m already everyone’s enemy! So before I get hit first I will be the one to get the first strike!

-Go, batmon, tentacle attack!

-Aru aru!

“Kuaaaaaht?!”

Eh, wait, this sounds familiar...

-Ahn, it’s a disciple.

Sorry.

(1) KR novel The Tutorial is Too Hard. Apparently the RATH and TiTH authors are found quite frequently in each other’s comment sections.

(2) Ditto, Pokemon. Pink blob that can transform into any other Pokemon. And also all it can do.

(3) Searches led to nothing. TL believes that this is an original metal. 미스테일 was the raw term, also spellable as Myhtale (lol)

I’m sure you guys REALLY didn’t need me to point out the One Piece and other Pokemon reference...

Chapter 26

And So The Story Begins (10)

#8 Their story: The future legendary host's story.

"Tha... that was uncalled for..."

My entire body's screaming. Ahh. This feeling. It's been a while. I didn't want to feel it but it was already too late.

"I apologise."

In this case is it the instructor's fault for always insisting on the alpha strike, or is it Sia's fault who created this situation where he had no choice but to do it? Or, is it my fault for getting hit? Well, the last option definitely isn't it.

"We survived somehow."

"You really somehow managed to get away."

"Sia didn't bother taking us as hostages."

The instructor nodded sagely to me who was currently sprawled out against the ground.

I don't know what that nod is supposed to mean so I'll just ignore it.

But.

"What happened to Sia?"

"She's currently sleeping after a beating with the metal bat."

"You didn't kill her."

"I don't kill my disciples."

At the all-too-calm answer I couldn't help but sigh. No, even if he didn't kill them.

"There are times when death is the more peaceful option."

“Sia said the exact same thing when I told her what happened to Rood.”

“Rood was there as well?”

“No, I met him before I came back to the organization. He said he came to take me to the princess.”

Just what the heck did this instructor do, that ‘that imperial princess’ is also chasing after him? I’d heard a lot of rumours about that princess.

‘The most beautiful, but also the one with most thorns.’

The count’s daughter who sought me often at the club told me that. For the record, this person’s nickname in social circles was ‘thornbush.’

If a person who got that nickname by mercilessly rejecting the noble men that came after her, gave the princess that evaluation then just what kind of person would she be?

But rumours from others were also different.

‘I met Her Highness a while ago, she said she was raising black roses as a hobby. She said she was raising them to give to someone, and I thought that the princess had a unexpectedly girlish side to her. Ah, Rein, do you know what a black rose means in the language of flowers?’

I was reminded of the duke’s daughter who gave me a black rose she’d obtained. That was quite troublesome at the time.

In the language of flowers, a black rose meant ‘you’re mine.’

Unlike her girlish appearance as that duke’s daughter shyly gave me the flower, she was actually on the cusp of breaking through to the swordmaster realm, as well as the vice-captain of the princess’s personal knight order.

Meaning, an administrator who directly serves the princess!

The words of an admin always has persuasive power.

Because of that I thought that the rumours from the social circles were all exaggerated.

The rumours from the outside weren't great and most of them were from the Great War. How she had become terror incarnate in the hearts of enemy soldiers meant she was that skilled, and even when they discussed who was the most talented person among the imperial family, the princess's name always came up.

I thought that the other noble ladies had just spread rumours out of jealousy of her beauty and talent.

But, at this moment, from what I heard from Sia and the instructor the truth was revealed!

As an active club worker, as someone who served women of nobility, the language of flowers was a tool we used frequently, and to me who could recite the language of flowers off by heart, the meaning of a black rose meant 'you're mine.'

Because the other meanings were too dark and miserable! The noble girls don't want to hear about that!

But considering what I heard from the instructor and Sia, and the obsession that could be compared to Sia and the meaning of 'you're mine', then other meanings are naturally added on.

Resentment and hatred.

Wow, that fits really well.

I hate you and I resent you but you are still mine!

The image of the princess tending to a bed of black roses while chucking 'fufufu,' sends a shiver down my spine!

What the hell! There's someone worse off than I am! The imperial princess and Sia! Compared to that, I, who had to flee back to the organization just because of a scrap between duke's daughters am a joke!

If it's that combination then any number of lives isn't enough! You need to be able to flee officially or unofficially, but in this case you can't run either in the light or the dark!

And the even more horrifying thing is that even the in the midst of all this the

instructor is still running away perfectly fine! What the hell, it's scary! And physically the metal bat! It's so scary!

And as I shook in fear the instructor said a shocking story, no a command.

"Pretend to be me and flee the organization."

"Yes?"

If I get caught I'm dead. Not just dead, after I get the full imperial torture course to reveal the instructor's location and have all my limbs cut off, they're going to drop acid on my neck one drop at a time to kill me.

No, maybe even worse than that!

"In, instructor. I just want to die normally."

"With this?"

"Hiiiiik!"

But the instructor in front of me has the metal bat! To imagine a choice between one where I die cruelly in pain and where I can't die cruelly in pain!

Why is my future so bleak?!

"Instructor, save me..."

"Just what is the princess to you that you're doing this..."

"A Sia on a bigger scale?"

"I can't refute that."

He didn't deny it. Yep. I'm dead.

No matter where I go the only path that awaits me is pain. I wanted to walk a path of flowers as a club host, but reality is a path of thorns no matter where I walk.

"Now, if you don't leave soon you'll have Sia to deal with as well as the princess."

"Where are you going to go instructor..."

"Through another route, across the border where I'm going to live my days as a farmer in a kingdom at the end of the world."

The moment I bait the princess I'm already dead right?

“So use these to convince the kids.”

“What are they?”

“The seals of their families. The Nermia county’s former head is a current head of a Magic Tower. If you can get help from them, not even the princess can easily lay her hands on them. Same with the other seals, all are part of families that can’t easily be ignored.”

It sounds logical enough, but would they really go as far as making an enemy out of the princess to help me? I think they’d just take the seals and wipe their hands immediately?

“And you also have that.”

“Although I think that it’s just going to be a hindrance as we’re escaping but... as a hostage it should be fine.”

The woman trussed up in a sack is a beauty on the outside, the reality is a spinster host club regular Sword Star.

Even if she looks like that she’s the little sister of the current Marquis Aserid, and a countess in her own right! But!

“If I use her as a hostage I think I’ll be the one that’s a hostage instead?!”

Right now she’s out and drooling but she’s the Sword Star! The most illustrious with the sword! At the same time the most thuggish with the sword! Out of all the fighters that pick scraps for fun, she’s the number one fighter!

And because of that, I’ve got no shot of...

“And for that reason, I’ll give you that.”

“Re, really... are you really giving me this?!”

It’s here! Could it be! If that thing is permanently mine... I could possibly tread the path where death is a real possibility.

“Now, I’m fooling you anyway. The princess already knows this. Even if she’ll want information from you, she probably won’t torture or kill you. She was oddly obsessed about the people in my immediate surroundings. Although she might try to win you over to become her subordinate, she won’t kill you.

“Kurrgrhh...”

Along with my sword, I can feel the weight of the bat. It's light.

But at the same time it's heavy. If the weak has a treasure then it is stolen by the strong.
Can I protect it?

“Now, choose.”

“I, I'll do it!”

But there is no choice! If you were a disciple of the instructor, who could refuse this seduction!

Not even Sia could forget the trauma from our trainee days and went to try to forge one herself, but all she made were failures! And even those failures were bought by the others of our cohort as they saved up their wages for them!

But I, I can have the original! It's not the metal bat, but it's still the chance for me to have the wooden bat!

“Now, this is your doppelganger. Use this to fool the empire's troops.”

Pat pat.

As if telling me to do my best, the instructor patted me on the shoulder. I was filled with devotion as I yelled in a confident voice.

“I'll defeat any enemy that comes!”

“You don't necessarily have to defeat them. Well, good luck.”

“Good luck, instructor!”

Looking at the instructor walk away I was saturated in delight. Finally, the bat is in my hands!

“Now, No.17. Or should I call you by name from now on?”

“It, it's okay.”

Although the kids are looking at me with somewhat repulsed expressions, I don't care

right now.

“Now, check if your family’s seal is in here somewhere.”

“Uh, yes!”

“Is the instructor not coming with us?”

“The instructor is going his own way. We just need to avoid the empire’s troops for a while, then get caught.”

“Bait?”

No.1000’s tilted her head as she asked me. Hm. Well, it’s right, right?

“You could say that.”

“It’s here! I found it!”

“Why do we have to?”

“Is the instructor not running away?”

No.1 who was staring at me with discontent, No.17 who was happy at having found the seal. And No.1000 who seemed a bit sad.

All unique children just as expected of the instructor’s disciples.

And they’re also kids that need to run around with me for a while for the instructor’s sake.

So. Let’s give them some motivation.

“Any complaints?”

“””None, sir!”””

As I slightly raised the bat, everyone’s motivation maxed out. Hmm. As always the bat is all-purpose.

“Over there! There’s a person over there!”

“Damn it, it’s His Highness’s orders! Find the one called Naruan!”

“The enemy has already faced off against over 200 of our elites. They are tired!”

“Don’t kill them, but disarm them!”

Sounds came far away from beyond the cave. And these voices that are getting closer are the empire’s soldiers as I expected. To think the empire’s army would get this close

already. I need to hurry up and escape...

“Temporary instructor!”

“Can’t you call me Rei-uup?!”

“You dare... You..... dare!”

But a greater danger than the empire’s army came from a lot closer. Somewhere down the line the Sword Star had gotten free from the sack she was in and was glaring at us with eyes filled with rage.

Although there was nothing was in her hand, but to one of the greatest swordsmen of all time, and especially the one judged as having the greatest magic power, it seemed that the matter of actually having a sword or not was irrelevant to her.

“Mana sword?”

“You’re kidding me, right? That kind of magic power is possible?”

What was in her hand was a blue sword. That was sword ki, no, compressed mana, a sword where sword aura itself was compressed into a sword!

Sharper than any legendary blade, and more destructive than any magic, that thing gradually grew in shape and form.

It’s dangerous. It’s too late to run. In that case. Only. One. Way. Out.

Bat style, hidden moves!

“Star Destr... pathetic!”

Bat throw!

Thud!

The bat was thrown square in the face of the Sword Star who had been stupidly amassing mana in both hands.

As you’d expect from the Sword Star who had enough talent to fight for the title of the Magic Sword, she blocked it with a magic barrier but that was her mistake!

This bat is a legendary item said to have been made from a branch of the World Tree!

Just its existence alone was enough to shred through magic barriers like paper, hit the Sword Star square in the face and the sound of the bat rolling against the ground was the only thing that filled the air.

And.

“Over there! The Sword Star is there too!”

“The enemy has engaged the Sword Star!”

“Wait, wait! Something’s wrong!”

“The, the Sword Star!”

“It can’t be!”

Shock and fear, surprise and disbelief were written on the empire’s soldiers’ faces, and sure why wouldn’t they.

Thud!

The Sword Star’s knees hit the ground. Her hands that she’d raised to her head dropped.

Of course the Mana Sword had already vanished. Her face hit the earth of the cave and she collapsed just like that. As a result of having blessed to the max by the metal bat, she took in the pure pain from the wooden bat.

And because of that result I.

“The enemy has defeated the Sword Star!”

“Reinforcements! Call for reinforcements!”

“The enemy is powerful!”

Became the one who had defeated the Sword Star.

◇ ◇ ◇

-Hurkhurk... good bye, little sister! You’re being sold off because of my bad owner, but we’ll meet again one day!

Leaving behind Rein who emitted the exact aura as a Sect Disciple receiving orders

from a Sect Head in one of those old xianxia novels, while listening to the metal bat play out a third-rate soap opera I moved through another escape route I'd dug out.

But if you're going to shoot a third-rate soap opera then do it properly, not even hukhuk but hurkhurk, if you weren't listening properly you'd think it was laughing.

-Hiing, owner doesn't know the pain of farewells! Pouring cold water all over a dramatic separation with my little sister!

-I've said this before and I'll say it again but that thing was born first.

-Hmph, we're tied together with a much thicker fate than just some worldly ties!

Since I am living a said worldly life, no more need be said. Right now for a worldly satisfying life it's time to run away!

-So where're we gonna go, are we really going to run away to the ends of the world and start farming?

"No, there's no way I'd actually do what I told Rein."

Very much unlike what you'd expect from my disciples, Rein actually has a loyal streak.

He takes care of his cohorts, and acknowledges his seniors as his seniors. Perhaps to teach my last cohort properly he diligently beat them with the bat as well.

Unlike the others who uses their comrades as meat shields, alpha strikes their seniors and sincerely beats the crap out of their juniors Rein is oddly normal.

And therefore, the most abnormal of all my disciples.

Because of that, odds are if the princess just brings out a few of his acquaintances from his host days, he'll probably spill everything.

She'd just have to bring out one of the duke's daughters that were fighting over him, get them to spill some tears crying,

'Rein... was it... all a lie?'

Then game over.

Most likely he'll spill everything to prove his sincerity.

Since surprisingly enough, Sia took care of him, the organization didn't notice his personality, and Rein didn't make any mistakes either, but since the organization's already done for then Rein's mouth right now is nothing less than an open door.

So of course, a life as a farmer is unfortunately on hold for now. But I will do it one day!

Farming life! That's a legendary lifestyle that only appears in legends!

Dream of a perfect farmer's life! Not a farmer that beats up a demon king, not a villager that's stronger than a hero,(1) but one that just grows fruits and vegetables, and sells them for a living!

-Thank goodness. I was scared for a second there that owner would transform me into a farming tool to plow the fields or something.

"...Genius?"

And I already have a farming tool!

And moreover, a farmer's god's tool that automatically blesses the land every time it's plows the earth?!

No, would the land die in pain?

"I need to experiment."

-Hiiiiik, nyooooo! This goddess Arcadia would be used to plow land! Nooo!

"Just transform to your human form and poke the ground with your finger. Then we'd know."

-Wiihn? Owner didn't you not like it when I transformed into my human form because it used a lot of mana.

"You need to be in human form for a while anyway so it's alright."

-Where're we goin'?

Since it's been a while since she was allowed in human form, the metal bat's words were filled with anticipation.

Yes, a place to lie low from the princess for a while. It's a place not even the princess

who personally moved to capture me would think of.

-Hurry hurry! Where's the place where this goddess descends? Where's the place of my freedom! Hurry and tell me!

"Near the imperial capital."

-Hiiik? You nuts? You're moving right next to the princess's place?

"Yes, to be precise."

One of the empire's greatest academies. The school that was the closes to the royal palace that the imperial family went to and from.

"The summoner's school, Yugrasia."

(1) Former is (probably) Murabito desu ka, Nani ka? (I'm a Villager, so what?), latter is probably Level 999 Villager. I could be wrong though.

Chapter 27

The Others' Stories (1)

#1 Their story: the story of the one who defeated the Sword Star.

"The enemy has defeated the Sword Star!"

"Kuaak, this, thisaaaaarrrrghh!"

"Damn it, tighten the encirclement! We cannot let him escape!"

"Ah, damn it. Why am I running away?"

"To not get hit."

"That's it!"

Magic that changed the landscape, and arrows that could paralyze with a scratch all flew over my head.

Ahh. Damn it. I'm tired as hell, and according to my original estimations we should have been captured a long time ago.

"Stop! You are already surrounded. It's too late for you to run now!"

The knight chasing after me is the problem!

What's there to hide, that's the duke's daughter I've constantly been referring to all this time!

And now that reminded me, the princess herself was part of this operation!

In that case it wasn't weird for the princess's knight order to mobilise, meaning that it was possible to meet up with said daughter, but to think we'd meet up right in front of each other!

If she saw me right in front of her eyes, how would she act?

Would she try to kill me for playing her? Or would she cry with tears streaming down her face?

Either way I'd prefer not to deal with. Especially the latter.

"Now, isn't it about time for us to get caught?"

"Since you defeated the Sword Star some really dangerous things are flying at us now too!"

"No.17, duck."

"Hiik! Hu, hurry with the warnings!"

No.17 of the Nermia family yelled at me as she just ducked under the arrow.

At this rate it seems like it'll be hard to get support from the Nermia family as well.

Hm. Yep. Let's just...

"Should we just die?"

"What bullshit is that!"

"Save the sleep talk for when you're actually asleep!"

"I think we really are going to die."

A large-scale magic dropped in front of us and left a crater.

It seems that the mage brigade have shown up in the air as well.

I think they're still mistaking me for the instructor at this point, I was wondering if I should mix in a counter or not but.

"That's dropping right this way?"

"What the hell, that's a bombardment! And a direct line of fire!"

"Dodge!"

That's an attack that even left No.1000 terrified, who the instructor said dodged the Empire-style bombardment like a joke.

Ah, now that I think about it, the instructor could have thought 'if it's this human, they probably won't die from just this.' and just poured on the attacks.

If I go forward, it's dangerous, if I stop the noble girl is waiting. Options, options...

‘There is one!’

Yes, there was a way.

Although it really did a number on my conscience, it’s better than me meeting directly with the girl.

“Doppelganger, if you complete this successfully then you’re free.”

“I’m ready for anything.”

As I saw the doppelganger nod, I had the doppelganger take off its hood and run in a different direction from ours.

And the bait was successful.

“Re, Rein?!”

Although my heart hurts to see the noble lady’s wide eyes on seeing the doppelganger but it can’t be helped!

-Run, as far as possible!

-Alright.

I said the contract would be complete once it was caught.

But instead, getting caught deliberately was forbidden. It just had to run as far and fast as possible to divert attention.

“Kasen! You lead the squad and continue pursuit. I will chase after the stray.”

“Eh? Vice-captain, what?!”

Thankfully the noble lady took five subordinates and started chasing the doppelganger.

After separating from us the doppelganger would be lucky to last ten minutes.

If a person uses magic then they could exert speeds even faster than a horse, but there’s a limit.

Because of this we’ve been using many tools the instructor had given us to stop the

horses' movements and increase the distance between us, but we were running out of tools, and I didn't want to feel any guiltier seeing the noble lady nearly fall off her horse several times chasing after us.

And now, since she's not here...

"Surrender now?"

"Is it finally over?"

"End?"

The moment we stopped the bombardment stopped like a lie, and the kids breathed a sigh of relief.

"Don't move!"

"Iiiit?"

"Hold, hold on?!"

But very quickly, I brought a dagger up to No.1's neck.
He's still a duke's son, therefore he has plenty of use as a hostage!

"We need to buy more time."

"Wait, but why am I the hostage?"

"Your house is the best off."

"Really?"

Looking at it, our pursuers made baffled expressions.

Yes, organization members were running away together, and if they suddenly start up a hostage scenario then anyone would find it weird!

"Ahhh~ I'm Duke Raina's son Raina rel Swin! I was undercover in the evil organization as a spy, but I got caught! Save me."

"Oi, that's way too awkward, can't you act properly?"

"This much should be fine?"

With those words it seemed there was a commotion among the knights before another knight came forward after sending the others back.

"I am Her Highness's Third Knight Order's First Squadron Captain, Kasen! If there's

anything you want then begin negotiations!"

Wow, it seems like the name of the knight order really is the Third Knight Order. While others use family names, flowers, animals and such, the rumours that princess said she couldn't be bothered and just named them by their ordinal numbers was true!

Wait, before that.

What kind of deal do I have to make so that I don't show myself getting caught to the noble lady.

She's going to come back anyway once she realises the doppelganger is a fake, so if I'm caught now the end result is the same anyway.

Should I ask for my face to be hidden? Or, should I ask to be carried away by the mage corps instead of the knights?

"Tell us your demands. Right now thanks to the mages, only you and I can hear each other! So tell me what you want!"

"We had no warning?!"

"They're serious... is this the skill of the empire's strongest mage corps?"

To my horror and No.17's lament. The surroundings were already surrounded with a thick magic barrier.

That meant that we were already trapped, and the barrier could not only absorb sound, but also act as a formation to keep us trapped, and also a method to kill us.

And to think they could trap us like this without any of us getting the slightest warning!

Is this the skill of the imperial princess's mage corps, that are called the empire's strongest!

"Then... I surrender on the condition that my identity is not revealed!"

"What kind of conditions are those?"

"Adults have adult's problems. If my face is revealed right now then I'm in big trouble..."

"Wait, wasn't this to stall for time for the instructor?"

“Just for old times’ sake, just because the princess was chasing after the instructor, that was why I was running away with you?! But this was just for your own problems?”

Wow, these kids eyes’ are getting icy. If I drag this any longer I thought I might be blindsided by these kids first...

“The reason is... is it because of the other women you met. Or...”

But there was someone else that blindsided me first.

“Is it because of me, Rein?”

“Milady?!”

“Rein, did you really think I wouldn’t recognise you?”

This is a trap! I’m currently under the influence of illusion magic by these skilled empire mages. There, there’s no way that person can be the real deal!

“Hm, by the looks of that expression it seems you believe that I’m an illusion brought on by magic.”

“Ha, how?!”

“Well, it’s obvious on Rein’s face.”

Those blue eyes look into mine and curved into gentle crescents.

Is that really an illusion?

As if he could tell my insecurity, No.1 who was caught as a hostage muttered.

“Um, could you please not hold the knife so close to my neck? You’re shivering a lot right now? Because of that the blade’s brushing my neck a lot, at this rate it really seems like I’ll see blood? Wait, hold on! You’re shaking even more! Dan, dangerous!”

“Now Rein, leave that thing behind, and come to me. Even Her Highness permitted it as well.”

“That thing? Did she just call me ‘that thing?’”

“No.1, I don’t think now’s a time for us to interrupt.”

“Yep.”

“Hey, do you think those words would come if you were in my shoes?!”

No.1’s yelling something, but since the noble lady in front of me took up more of my

attention I ignored him.

“When did you know?”

“I’d be lying if I said from the beginning. Just. Out of curiosity. I asked Her Highness, and she told me.”

“Then, why...”

“That’s. because I like you.”

Those were lines that should definitely be giving me a touching feeling, but all of a sudden, for some reason I understood the instructor’s sentiments.

Such as Sia or the princess, just why he went around running away from beautiful women.

“I know. That you were working for the organization. That you handed over the information you got from us over to them. But, you never once told them any of our secrets, and you never lied to us, not even once. And... Rein is too kind so you can’t abandon people.”

The sword at her waist slowly rose higher and higher. But the direction it was pointing at was the opposite direction to its normal use.

“Now, this is a hostage, Rein. If you don’t come to me, this sword will stab the human named Iris.”

“Holding yourself as hostage, are you insane?!”

“I don’t know. For all you know, this is an illusion, like you imagined. But Rein, I’ve told you before. I.”

-Rein. If it’s for you, then I could even die for you.

“Rein, if it’s for you, then I could even die for you.”

The moment the girl wearing a beautiful dress and the knight in armour overlapped in my imagination, a red line of blood started to trickle down her throat.

“Milady!”

“Heheh, I’ve got you.”

If this is an illusion then I don’t have a choice but to be captured...

“Wow, they’re ignoring us and filming a love story...”
“Ah, I’m getting goosebumps. I hate those kinds of things.”
“I only had one meal today.”

Although it’s a heavy love that these kids can’t understand, but I still can’t abandon her.

The warm blood that I touched as I brought my hand up to her neck only served to tell me that this was reality.

“Really, did you have to... eh?”

Click.

“I’ve really, caught you.”

But, as I was wiping the blood off the lady’s neck, at that moment I felt something fasten and lock around my own.

During my tertiary trainee days, the words that the instructor had said to me then flashed through my head.

-Ahh, I nearly died back then. In the pandemonium called the imperial court, I was working under that princess to boot. Plus, the. Princess. Always. Picked. People. Si. Mi. Lar. To. Her. As. Her. Own. People. So. Even. Her. Sub. Ord. In. Ates. Were. All. Si. Mi. Lar. To. Her. So everyone close to the princess were all essentially miniature versions of her.

And not too long ago, what I’d said when we parted from the instructor.

-Just what is the princess to you that you’re doing this...
-A Sia on a bigger scale?
-I can’t refute that.

And, the story of the black rose I’d talked with this girl previously.

-I met Her Highness a while ago, she said she was raising black roses as a hobby. She said she was raising them to give to someone, and I thought that the princess had a

unexpectedly girlish side to her. Ah, Rein, do you know what a black rose means in the language of flowers?

And the last thought was, when I told the instructor that I was working as a club host under the Intelligence Agency, he had said this.

-Let me make a prediction. I'll put one gold on you either getting enslaved or stabbed to death by a girl you meet there.

Ah, instructor. The comments you threw so casually so often became reality, but was that not a joke?!

At least you should have put more money on it to make me more careful!

But was that it? Before I worried about the instructor, did I have to watch out for myself first!

"No.17. Hold on. Something's weird?"

"Moron, we didn't see anything. Didn't you learn this in the organization?"

"Where from?"

"The Intelligence Agency vice-director."

"I think I get it."

Right now I wanted to turn my head to those kids and yell at them to save me, but the lady's hand that had put something around my neck held my face tight and stopped me from so much as turning my head.

"This is a special collar that Her Highness gave to me to put on the person called Ast. It's a special dwarven collar that has no key hole, and once it's locked the only person that can undo it is the mana flow of the person of the original user. As a matter of course, it can track the wearer's location, and it can also paralyze or knock out the wearer. So Rein."

As her red lips came closer to me and kissed my cheek, she whispered quietly into my ear.

"Now... you can't, run away."

Chapter 28

The Others' Stories (2)

#2 Their story: the empire soldier's story.

"Now the person called Ast that ran away with Rein's appearance is also going to get caught, so all we have to do is wait here and meet him."

"Huh?"

Listening to the noble girl who had put a leash on him and was humming, Rein realised that something had gone wrong.

"Ah, you didn't know? The reason why the number of people that chased after you was so few was partly because to fool you Rein, but also to fool the person named Ast. Everyone that's worked long enough with the princess is wary of the person named Ast. Except for the personnel that's here that I stationed in case of emergencies, everyone else's gone to chase him. No matter how incredible that person is, he won't be able to do anything by himself."

Hearing this, Rein was certain. He fell for the trap, but equally so did this woman.

And if he didn't tell her the truth now, then the responsibility of all that might fall square onto him.

"Uh, uh, milady..."

"Rein, although you said it was the club's rules in the past that stopped you from calling my name, but that's not the case now, isn't it? Rather than 'milady,' 'Iris.' Ah, it might be even better if you called me Irie like my family."

"No, milady, that's not..."

"Iris!"

"Tha... I... Yes, Miss Iris,... that's not the important thing right now..."

"It is! Hm, because you're not used to it yet, you can call me 'miss' for now, but in the future, I want you to leave the 'miss' out as well."

"Ah, I understand. But, I'm saying this again, there's something important..."

"What's the matter? Surely there's no reason why you should be stammering like that

between us?”

Rein wondered whether he could say this, but having made the judgement that the instructor had gotten a long way away by now, he said the truth.

“Miss Iris, actually... the thing that ran away with my appearance wasn’t the instructor but a contracted doppelganger.”

“Eh?”

In that instant, the noble girl’s smile that had been lovingly looking down on Rein froze instantly.

“The instructor has already fled through another route, and he said he’d live life in a village far away at the end of the world as a farmer...”

The noble lady didn’t reply to Rein. But her expression told him everything.

Her whiter and whiter face.

Her clattering teeth. And the shivering of her hands that he could even feel through his collar.

Shortly afterwards, after shaking for a while she quietly murmured.

“I’m screwed...”

#3 Their story: The empire soldier’s story.(2)

‘It’s finally over!’

Unless one was on the level of being able to be called an archdevil, it was pie in the sky to receive a soul as the price for your assistance.

Normal devils made provisional contracts with treasures or other commodities as compensation, and I too, did the same.

And I saw hell.

I had definitely contracted with what humans called an evil organization, filled with people that would make good partners for devils, but what I'd faced would put trainee heroes to shame.

Their skills improving was all perfectly natural, but as if they couldn't feel any pain, these kids would charge in injuries and all as if they didn't know what a limit was, both I and the other doppelgangers it was tasked with were all horrified.

At a later date, when I had gone to consult with another doppelganger that had met a hero recorded in history, or more accurately had been a stepping stone for said hero, he said this.

-What, that's scary. Not even the hero went that far...

It was seriously like hell. Just once I'd gotten so pissed I'd breached the terms of the contract just a bit to pull out my true strength to give the kids pain.

Even disregarding my own skills as a doppelganger, I had turned the enemy into a pain-sensitive state where even the slightest brush would give them unspeakable pain.

But in that state they were burnt, sliced and tore their skin, yet they were smiling.

'How, how are you lot enduring this pain!'

"Kuahahaha! If you compare this pain to the metal bat then it's nothing more than child's play!"

Just what is the bat?

And worse, the next generation's brats called disciples were even worse.

-Lord Surtr why are you...

-I was scammed into a contract.

As the doppelgangers looked on at the slave life of the great giant that burned down a world the doppelgangers all realized that they needed to get out of this place as soon as they could.

And not long afterwards all of them got the freedom they wanted. Except for himself!

“We finally, finally caught you!”

“Give up, Sir Ast!”

“You’re going back to the princess!”

Out of fear I’d be recontracted because I half-assed this job I ran away like I’d set my soul on fire.

But even that was its limit, if I’m caught, the contract is finally over.

‘I’m never coming out into the human world again!’

I made a firm resolve to never come out again even if the compensation was a soul.

‘Humans, scary... ;

That place called Howling was a place that opposed the empire. And the people in front of me are imperial soldiers.

To think the empire’s soldiers were this monstrous, then that organization Howling also raised at least this level of monsters!

Who called humans the weakest race! Are they not a race that are stronger than devils and even have more numbers than us!

“I can’t see the bat!”

“It really does seem like he handed it over to Rein to fool us.”

“We have reports that there’s a higher level of weapon than that so be cautious!”

I’m saying this again, but the humans in front of us were all difficult to defeat even if I’d used all my true strength.

And these humans feared the thing called a bat! Is this bat some kind of planet-destroying weapon or something?

But thanks to that, he could buy more time so the doppelganger was thankful for that.

And around forty minutes later.

“Ah, the contract’s over.”

“Wh, what?!”

“Thi, this is a doppelganger?”

“Does that mean vice-captain Iris’ side was the real one?!”

“C, contact with vice-captain Iris. The person she caught was the one named Rein, and Sir Ast has escaped! I repeat, Sir Ast has escaped! He said he’d go live in a village at the end of the world and live as a farmer there!”

As his spirit became fainter and fainter, at the appearances of the human falling into shock and despair seeing the living metal that was his body gradually lose its form, the doppelganger shouted.

-Hahaha, it’s the best! Freedom and despair, I get both of them as I go!

But, even as it did the doppelganger thought.

‘Just what is it exactly that this level of humans fear...’

#4 Their story: Atia nel Karuan’s story.

“So, you failed?”

“I, I’m sorry, noonim!”

The strongest nation in the continent, Karuan.

And the future emperor of that Karuan was currently begging me on his knees. Hm, well. That doesn’t matter.

“You’re going to die anyway...”

“Hiiik!”

“Your Highness? Even so that’s...”

“Shut up.”

“I’m sorry!”

As I told her with a bright smile Reia immediately collapsed into her corner. Now, where were we?

“So, my little brother, how far in were we? Your last will and testament.”

“You were still listening to my story, noonim! Not my will!”

“That is your will.”

I'd waited ten years for this. For this day, I'd personally dispatched people to the organization named Howling, I'd negotiated and cooperated with people sent there indirectly, and I also managed to turn his disciples.

And naturally, the organization named Howling was destroyed. But.

“My little brother, as Crown Prince you did a great job. The organization is destroyed, we've gotten a considerable amount of results and research material that the evil organization had been working on, we've confiscated a considerable amount of resources so that we'll be able to invest quite a bit of money into next year's budget, and we've even got a list of names of those that were cooperating with Howling so the imperial court's going to reek of blood once again. Since we had to clean out the trash anyway, a perfect job! And since you managed to capture the organization's head alive, His Majesty will be very pleased as well.”

The capital's citizens were already in full festivities praising my little brother and Father.

Hm. That's good. That's a good thing. My little brother was indeed useful. But.

“But if that Crown Prince was found as a corpse the next day, that would be really amusing, no?”

“I'm sorry, noonim! Just my life?!”

As I kicked my little brother's chin who was all but ready to dive for my legs he flew all the way back to Reia.

But, my little brother crawled back again to cling to my legs. Ast said this in the past.

There's a small fraction of perverts that love being the crap beaten out of by women, was my little brother one of them?

Well, so what. He's dead soon anyway.

“But, why was the task I assigned you the only thing that wasn't completed? How strange?”

“We, we’re still in pursuit.”

Pursuit...

You’re chasing him? Ast? Do you really think that’s Ast?”

“According to the reports from the chasing group, he defeated the Sword Star in a single hit and is on the run. Aside from Ast, there’s no person in the organization with that skill.”

“really?”

The Sword Star that old man Nermia negotiated with lost.

The Sword Star’s skills are already well-known far and wide. Moreover, that seemingly endless magic power, if she had chosen not the sword but magic, she could have been the strongest magician in history.

If it’s that Sword Star’s defeat then of course it could only be Ast.

Since the daughter of the Nermia family was one of his disciples he’d sent her along, but an unexpected result.

“Right now, your direct subordinates as well as all of mine that I can mobilize are moving right now and narrowing the encirclement, so please wait, noonim.

Perhaps he’d realised my anger had abated slightly, my little brother slowly approached. Alright, so I’ll put killing my little brother on hold for now.

“Tell me why you failed, first.”

According to predictions, there was no way he could have escaped from the organization.

But he escaped. So I need to find out why. One time is enough for mistakes. I can’t lose him again to another one.

“Approaching the main base was harder than we expected. There were so many civilians near the main base we couldn’t even tell who was an organization agent and who was a civilian.”

“Civilian? Civilians were living next to an evil organization?”

“Yes, more accurately they were being domesticated. They gave land and money to refugees and slaves, and helped them out until they could become self-sufficient. Plus since the city’s lord was also an organization member he also took less taxes from the local civilians. Because of that praises were sung far and wide about how good the city was to live in, even the soldiers were surprised.”

Ahh, I didn’t see it myself but I can clearly see how it unfolded.

Since slaves that didn’t know when they’d die, or refugees who had abandoned their homes because of despot lords and taxes, were given a place that they’d only ever dreamed of and were allowed to live there by someone unknown, of course their heads would be filled with flowers.

“The name was called the Utopia Plan. There were also apparently dozens of cases where heroes or braves came along, thought they were mistaken and just left. Because of that, there was fierce resistance when we moved to subdue Howling. Thanks to that, we made all of them sleep by either knocking them out or with sleep magic, and thanks to that it was a bit dangerous, but perhaps there was a terrorist on the inside or something, the majority of the important buildings were on fire. Perhaps it was noonim who ordered that?”

“Hm... I don’t know. I did have people on the inside, but I never said anything other than to get Ast?”

Well, although someone could have started to cause an internal confusion.

But the Utopia Plan. Even the name sounds amusing. Well, he was always doing weird things and was very good at spinning them the right way.

Utopia... a nice-sounding yet a perfectly dystopic plan. But since the people themselves don’t realize they were domesticated, could you call it a utopia?

“Could I use this?”

“Eh? Noonim?”

“No, it’s just a passing thought.”

Humans must be free.

That is how their individual personalities are expressed, and their true worth is shown. That’s what he said.

And since he's never been wrong up till now, I need to respect that.

Of course he's an exception. Since there's no personality that stands out more than him, nor is there a person of more worth.

That's why, it's alright even if he doesn't have his freedom.

"Reia, tea."

"Yes!"

Reia hurriedly ran from her corner and poured me tea.

Very well, not yet. There are still chances remaining. It's too early to give up. If it's ten years I've waited long enough.

I don't need any more patience. For this moment I gathered up competent subordinates, made contact with countless nobles.

This was the moment to trust in those ten years of effort. But just as I thought that, I remembered an old conversation with that person.

'Your Highness, there's a favourite saying of mine.'

'What is it?'

'To get your foot cut by your trusted axe.'(1)

'...You really are weird.'

'Your Highness, I wish you would take this to heart. My words right now are the truth. When the thing Your Highness trusted the most, comes back to stab you in the back at the decisive moment could come in any situation.'

Why is his quaint smile as he said those words coming to mind right now?

"Milord Crown Prince! Emergency report!"

And the answer came quicker than I expected.

"The person suspected to be Sir Ast that defeated the Sword Star was a different individual! We currently have no leads on the whereabouts of Sir Ast's location!"

"Wai, wait! If you say that now then?!"

Ah. Yes. That's right.

Ast. Your words were always correct at the most exquisite moments?

I prepared for ten years. I believed.

And this is how I get my feet cut open.

Shatter!

"Hiik! You, Your Highness! Y, your hand?!"

"Reia. I think this knight is tired because of his run here. Lead him away to rest up."

"Wai, wait a second! Sir Reia! Don't leave me alone!"

"I accept Your Highness's command!"

"Sir Reia? Sir Reia? Sir, Sir Reiaaaa!"(2)

As expected from my long-time bodyguard, Reia quickly led the knight outside. She has good sense in shutting the door behind her.

Now, then.

"Noo, noonim? Th, that could get dangerous so treating your hand should be..."

My dear little brother's eyes are shaking.

Ah, I unconsciously broke my teacup with my hand. It's dripping blood. Well... does it matter? Even if I clean it up it's going to get blood on it anyway.

"Noonim? Noonim? I, I say there! Is there anyone there! The, the Crown Prince is about to die! He, help me!"

Ahh, looking at my dear little brother like that, another memory with that person is surfacing.

-Your Highness, it's not good for you if you always make an angry expression.

-Smile. Smile even when nothing is happening, and when you're angry, then smile, smile even brighter. Sometimes, smiling can be a more effective way to convey Your Highness's anger than simple rage.

-Yes, like that. See there. Isn't Sir Reia shaking in the corner over there?

Ah. Right. That's right, wasn't it?

Then now. In this moment. Let's make the biggest smile in my life.

(1) This is one of the more well-used Korean idioms, used to 'describe a situation of betrayal or the failure of something you believed in.' Considering this author and this MC it's also the most frequently-used idiom in this entire novel. Actually, for this one and for future idioms, do you guys want me to localize them or do a direct TL for them with TL notes in the bottom? Edit: Idiom reverted back to the unlocalized form.

(2) Snake? Snake? Snaaaaaaaaaaakeeeeeee! Yeah, no I'm not sure if it's a direct reference to Solid Snake's death(s) from Metal Gear or not, but it's still funny :P

Chapter 29

The Others' Stories (3)

#5 Their story: Sia nel Karuan's story.

"Can you hear me?"

"Ah..."

What I saw as I opened my eyes to my familiar subordinate's voice was a black ceiling.

That's right. I came. I came...

That thought kept circulating around my head.

-Once you wake up you will already be at your house.

He's still as bad as ever.

To think he'd say that to me, an orphan without a home or a place to go back to.

There's only one place I want to go back to.

"By any chance, he wasn't caught by the princess, was he?"

"Indeed. The person that defeated the Sword Star was deduced as Sir Ast... I mean Instructor Naruan and was pursued, but was revealed as captain's peer Rein."

"Ha? Rein beat the Sword Saint? He was the weakest of all of us?"

"That was what was reported to us."

Since they'd already gotten that far, Master will already have defeated the Sword Star. Since she was unconscious enough for even Rein to carry the Sword Star probably wasn't in her most optimal condition. But she's still the Sword Star.

Since the Sword Star's an opponent that would be impossible for Rein to beat if she as awake.

In that case...

“He must have handed over the bat.”

“Huh?”

“It exists. Humanity’s strongest weapon.”

Then that makes sense.

He could probably neutralise the Sword Saint in one strike with that.

I had the help of my own secretly trained forces and the emperor’s direct shadows, as well as the princess’s help.

The numbers were over 200.

I even had them hide their bodies in the dark and used less torches to have him underestimate our numbers.

But master was always one step ahead of me. And the unfortunate truth was that he was one step ahead of me in the critical moment as well.

To be honest I was uneasy.

Our Master who wasn’t more outstanding than anyone, became the most outstanding for that reason, and our Master that was careless, became more careful than anyone because of that.

He would use any method to erase his weaknesses, and always develop new strengths.

Master always did the things that sounded easy, yet hard to actually realize.

Because of that, in all honesty this operation made me uneasy, and in some aspects it went as expected.

“Casualties?”

“Amazingly, none. Even our allies that were hit by friendly fire in the confusion were treated. To be honest... I still don’t know what it was that we fought against.”

“Then again, that sounds about right.”

Firstly, it hurts when you're hit.

Even I who endured during all sorts of training couldn't avoid that pain.

But funnily enough that was also treatment.

Once, just once when Maren suffered a critical wound during training, Master brought out the metal bat.

Ah, now that I think about it that was also the first time I saw the metal bat.

-In, instructor! Even so that's too far!

-Sending him off comfortably would be... huh?

-Is he hurting him because he didn't finish training... eh?

We all had to look at that scene with both our eyes wide open.

He was screaming and despairing as he hysterically laughed in pain as his sides were torn and his guts were spilling out, but we were stupefied as we saw the injury miraculously heal itself in front of our eyes as it was hit.

-Kill, kill me... just, kill me...

-Now, my disciples. You can get injured. There's even a way to heal you. So rest assured.

Master's smile then made even me who loved Master more than anyone else unconsciously take a step back, and the impact of the metal bat I felt not long after that even momentarily turned my loving heart into a murderous one.

And Maren who was crawling on the ground after suffering treatment from the metal bat survived. Much too perfectly fine.

To the extent that he woke up fresher than us the next morning. For the record, because of the trauma from this incident, he rejected countless love calls from paramilitary groups, and strongly pushed for a desk job and so went into Internal Affairs. He had become afraid of getting injured.

"Fu... fuhu... Huhuhu... Yes, hm. You wouldn't know."

"Miss Sia?"

As I looked at the ceiling I ignored my laughter that leaked through my lips.

Although it might seem somewhat unbecoming of a woman to laugh like that, for some reason I just want to keep laughing like this.

“Yes, Master is... an enigma.”

“An enigma?”

“Yes, Master is the unknown itself! He’s someone we simply cannot understand.”

I couldn’t understand with any common logic. No matter how long I’d been looking at him I still couldn’t understand.

Whether Master’s name was Naruan, Ast, Herman, Esedna.

Or maybe even something else I didn’t know about. No one knew.

The territory that Master used to live in had already long been burnt to the ground by the Empire, and Master’s traces that I tracked him by differed with every lead. What was more, when I stole records of someone else’s observations of Master and compared them to my own, all our records were different.

Sometimes, I despaired that I knew nothing about Master.

Sometimes, I feared that I meant nothing to Master.

Sometimes, I felt an emptiness wondering if the Master I knew and loved really existed.

So I was embarrassed, but went to ask Master himself.

-Master, Master!

-Instructor.

-Yes, instructor. I wanted to ask you something.

-Your training is already more or less complete, but very well. What is it.

-What is love? Does love exist? Then why does love change?

-Whew... and you suddenly came to me for this.

As if he couldn’t be bothered, or perhaps thought it ridiculous, but, he answered my question seriously.

-One’s first love is always special. Something new, something fun, something different. They fall in love with these. But most of the time people don’t care whether it’s real or

fake. Do you know why?

-Answering a question with a question. Unfair.

-Easily learned knowledge is just as easily forgotten.

I thought over it.

Why did I like Master.

Sure, at first, I cursed him.

-This little shit! Just why that motherfucker survive the great war and pull all this bullshit on us?!

A veteran among veterans of the Great War he was sent off to for an assignment, one of the instructor's greatest legends among many.

But if you had the only recently-developed empire-style magic bombardment thrown at you not long after you began training then you couldn't not swear.

What was next.

Hm. As I thought, more curses.

-Kuaaaaaagh! What, is that! Really! Is that little shit really human?!

Well that couldn't be helped either. The first time you're hit by the bat, you can't help but yell like that. Eh, now that I think of it just why did I come to love Master?

-Know? What? Just what do you know about me instructor! I don't even know who I am! What the hell do you know about me! Do you have any proof that you know anything about me?

Ah, it was then. Now that I think back on it was an embarrassing time, it couldn't be helped since I was in puberty.

And one day when I thought that it couldn't be helped.

And since the magical woman's day also came to me, and combined with my naturally filthy personality I was very, very moody, it was the day that still haunts my dreams and makes me throw off my bedsheets.

-I don't know.

To the extent that it seemed very heartlessly, very careless. But, his answer that buried itself deep in my heart.

-I can't say I know you either. No, to begin with in an evil organization there's no need for an exchange of emotions between instructor and disciple. The only thing I have to do, is teach you, and all you have to do is learn and grow. And to begin with, truth isn't a thing that is visible to the eye. And so, I cannot show you visible proof.

Wow. Now that I think about it, he didn't understand my existence at all. Just where did I fall for him. Ah, I remember.

-So I don't know you, and you don't know me. We're the same.

It's funny.

Nothing else, but 'the same.'

At the words that we were the same, those words were like salvation to me.

And later, when I happened to come across something as I investigated Master, the secret of my own birth that was not at all funny.

When I realised the existence of my father that was absent since my birth.

And the things that happened after that were all unimaginable.

But I felt that I understood myself better after that. But, I still don't understand Master.

-Do you not know?

What broke my thoughts were the instructor's relaxed voice.

I scrambled to answer.

-Because, because I wasn't used to it?

To be honest, I didn't fall because he said that. To be honest my love for master then was the same, but I couldn't understand back then. But Master nodded.

-Yes, it's because you are not used to it. People want love that's flash, elegant, that kind of love. And so they try to gain young and beautiful people in their hands, or try to

make brilliant people theirs no matter their means or methods to do so. To raise your own value is the same as loving yourself. And that's why you get quickly bored, or think your partner doesn't fit with you, or find someone else then you naturally go your separate ways.

-Then... is it different if you get used to love?

To my question, amazingly enough the instructor smiled gently and stroked my head.

-Indeed. Rather than getting used to it, maturing. When a person matures, they see depth in what they originally thought was simple or plain, and love what they didn't spare a glance for in the past. Even if there is no flashiness or elegance, they find the best worth in people in their own way.

-It's hard.

-Ho, and now who was the one that asked me that difficult question?

-Ma, Master?

-Instructor.

And Master who ruffled my hair was different to normal Master.

Later when I surveyed people that worked together with Master on missions, they said his personality on missions were completely different.

And although the Master I knew then was attractive, this Master was attractive in his own way.

And so I heard many stories from Master, the me back then didn't fully understand what he was saying.

Just, I really like this person as I talk with him.

Aside from realising that.

Ah, just one, these words I always kept to heart.

-Love is allowed. You are allowed to be selfish for the sake of love.

"Urgent report! Instructor Naruan's goal is a farmer's life in a village at the end of the continent. And it seems that Her Highness herself has moved personally on this matter."

Ahh, for once in a long time.

I was remembering fond memories, but, that princess has begun to make her move.

A person who has led a life completely different to mine, but with the same end goal.

“It seems like she, too, has decided to move herself.”

But the instructor, a farmer. What is this feeling that it doesn't suit him yet suits him at the same time?

“What will we do?”

“Aside from the princess's forces, each of us are to act on our own. The princess's forces are to return, tell His Majesty that I'm going on holiday.”

“We don't have holidays.”

“Hm? I have lot of spare holidays saved up. The empire's a place with really good social security.”

“We're unofficial.”

“Pfft. Then again. You guys don't officially exist after all. Alright. Then let me do the talking.”

They were the imperial family's shadows yet their jobs were all unofficial.

I smiled brightly as I thought such things.

“Your first holiday is a continent tour. The goal is the village at the end of the world.”

“I think our holidays will be tougher than our work.”

“That's not my problem.”

You just gotta do what you gotta do.

That was why His Majesty gave you guys to me.

My loving Master said this.

Love is allowed. You are allowed to be selfish for the sake of love.

So then let me be a bit selfish as well.

“If you think you can run, then try to run.”

Because I, in my selfishness, will capture Master.

Something Relatively Important That I Accidentally Skimmed Over In My First Readings: Sia’s surname. Compare her surname in the intro of this chapter, her given name in Chapter 6, and a certain princess’s full name in Chapter 28.

Chapter 30

The Others' Stories (4)

#6 Their story: No.1000's story.

Unlike No.1 and No.17, No.1000 didn't have a place to return to.

Meaning, she had to go back to the life where she couldn't eat every day.

Once she realised that, No.1000 despaired.

"Kukuung!"

"There's no need to make sound effects with your mouth."

"It's bad."

"Re, really?"

When No.1000 started thinking with a dead serious expression, No.17 was going to ask whether she'd be interested in coming back to her house with her, but the one who stopped No.17 was Iris whose face was still sheet-white from shock.

"Hey, you. The princess said she'd be taking you. She refuses your refusals."

"Huh?"

"The other kids might have their own families, but she told me to bring you back especially. Here."

She brought out a small box specifically ordered from the imperial palace, and when she opened the box there was a fresh, steaming steak inside.

"Ca, can I eat it?"

"Of course."

No.1000 gulped, and the moment when she put a bite-sized steak into her mouth.

".....!!!!!!!"

In that instant, No.1000's face turned bright red, and her eyes opened widely.

Her hands were flailing around in their air as if she didn't know what to do with them.

"If you come with us, then this quality of meals will be your everyday..."

"I'll come! I'll come! I'll come!"

And that was how No.1000 became the princess's right-hand woman.

#7 Their story: No.17's story.

"You did it!"

"Welcome back."

At the warm gazes my family sent me, my heart felt... it should feel warm. How should I put it.

Why does it feel like I'm about to break out in goosebumps?

-Give up owner. Owner's already, become accustomed to that place.

-No, no! It can't be!

-Owner. Don't deny it. Owner is already, one that this archdevil Surtr has acknowledged, a soul that is eviler and cruller than a devil.

-No! I'm a pure...

I suddenly shut up. That something, inside me is blocking it. No. it can't be.

But!

-Now, owner. Pure... so. What?

-I'm still pu... krrrrgghh... it, it can't be. But, but!

What is this, the world's will? Or is it the remnants of my conscience! Something is blocking from saying what I want to say.

-Urgh... I... am... not pure.

I was dirtied.

I was dirtied!

Only before I went to Howling there was a time where I simply enjoyed learning magic!

This is all the evil organization's fault!

"I believed in you. Because among all my daughters you had the most talent to adjust to Howling."

"Unni believed in you too. If it was you who lived less like a noble girl's life than a boor... I mean free-spirited life you'd act like a scumb... I mean adjust and survive there.

-Owner. I think your family knew owner's talents very well.

-No! Tha, that's just unni lying! She's just jealous that I've come back after completing a big job!

-Her eyes are way too pure for that.

-It, it can't be... lies...

But the more I heard my family's compliments the more I heard that they believed that I'd adapt well to an evil organization.

Moreover, Mother, the only one who didn't say something along those lines.

"Now all you need to do now is get married."

Went and said something like that!

What was the reason I went to Howling in the first place?! It was to get out of an arranged marriage!

But to be married off as soon as I got back!

"Mother, I am still lacking in knowledge."

"It's alright. Bridal lessons are something I can teach you quickly."

"N, not that kind of knowledge, but I want to learn more magic."

"Really?"

I barely convinced Mother who was looking at me with a slightly regrettable face and faced Father, the family head and announced loudly.

“I, will go to the academy for learning!”

I was someone who survived while feeling true pain.

A bunch of brats who simply played around in the fields going hahahoho would be no match for me!

But I didn't know then.

That there would be existences whose academy lives were filled with even greater pain than mine.

#8 Their story: No.1's story.

After returning home, and a bit of praise from Father I thought I'd be forgotten.

Well, of course.

Since mother passed away I have no backers, and I'm not the oldest, and I'm not famous either?

And so naturally like a rat in a hole, I thought I'd have to live quietly, and since my brothers seemed to feel sorry for sending a kid that wasn't even much of a threat to Howling, plus they had other threats to take care of so they couldn't be bothered dealing with me, and so it seemed like they were going to leave me alone.

But...

“Ha, so you're saying you blocked my way for just this?”

When a visiting noble tried to destroy a food stall because it was in the way of his carriage, my thread of reason snapping was the problem.

“Pl, please stop!”

“Shut up! Just? Just this?”

Ahh, I wasn't this kind of bastard. I wasn't someone who'd step forward like this, I was

someone who thought I could always fill my belly, but!

“The clothes you wear, the food you eat! Just where do you think they come from? You motherfucking leech, you dare cause trouble in a dining hall?! Do you have any idea how much it hurts when you’re starving!”

That was all I could remember.

From what I heard I cursed the noble and his entire clan with all the insults and curses I knew, and I beat down all his knights that tried to stop me by force and lectured him for about an hour on the importance of food.

And because of that, I became the most famous out of my brothers in the territory!

“His Excellence’s son Swin really thinks of us?”

“Yeah, apparently he understands our hunger well.”

“I heard he made huge achievements in the recent Howling incident as well, he’s quite the person.”

Whenever three or more people of our territory gather they start praising me.

The rumours became twisted and started to turn to something along the lines of me destroying the evil organization Howling that existed since the founding of the empire all by myself.

Because of this there were nobles that started to take note of me as well, and when it seemed that my brothers too, felt they couldn’t afford to leave me alone anymore.

“Let’s gap it.”

I decided to run away from home.

#9 Their story: the host turned prisoner(slave)’s story.

The three kids were all taken away by their respective caretakers, and I was waiting on standby in Iris’s tent. But...

“How, how, how...”

The always noble, beautiful.

The lady Iris who had always seemed like an unreachable flower on an unclimbable precipice was broken.

All the lady did was gnaw on her thumbnail, repeat the same words over and over again as she circled around me holding my leash.

Just what kind of person is this princess to induce this kind of fear in this woman!

“Mi, milady?”

“Iris!”

But she’s still not forgetting that part.

“Miss Iris, it seems someone is here.”

“Huh?”

Knock knock knock.

The temporary cloth entrance made of cloth, someone was knocking on a wooden plank to let us know they were there.

“I’m the mage captain Legas. We’re going to be holding a meeting with Her Highness soon through communication tools, meet up in ten minutes. Bring that man Rein too.”

“I understand.”

Although she said she was calm, the noble girl’s voice is still shaking.

But as if this problem wasn’t this girl’s alone, the voice of the mage captain Legas also had the same fear embedded in it.

Just what kind of archdevil is the instructor being chased by?

If a knight order’s vice-captain, and the strongest nation’s overwhelmingly strongest mage corps’ captain is dyed in that much fear, that means that so are their subordinates!

Just as I was seriously thinking that the instructor would have to be caught by the princess for the sake of world peace, the girl took a deep breath and shouted with a dignified expression.

“Alright, the answer is suicide!”

The method isn’t at all dignified?!

“Mi, milady? Suicide, why would you...”

“Rein. Rein might not know, but there are times when a clean quiet death is preferable to life.”

...I know.

I know since I was hit a lot!

Every time I was hit by the metal bat I honestly wished that we’d get casualties like other instructors’ trainees!

“So, Rein... you can... come with me, right?”

Eh? Where?

“If, it’s together with Rein... I’m not scared...”

“Muh, Milady? ‘Scuse me, Milady? Calm down. Right now Milady is thinking something very radical and very dangerous!”

“Yep. It’s radical. But... I did all sorts of things while telling Her Highness I’d catch him... but I failed. I can’t. I’m done for.”

Ah, she’s out. Her eyes are spinning. Am, am I going to die here?

-Crackle.

It was then. That the large crystal ball in the corner of the room began to make noise.

-krrck, krrrckrr, rkrkcrrrrk... Ah, crkckkk, ah, ah... ckrkcrrrk... ah, ah. Hm. Is it working?”

“Y, Your Highness?!”

In the crystal ball was a beautiful, brightly smiling, silver-haired, red eyed woman that reminded me of Sia.

-Ah, Iris. Vice-captain of my most trusted Third Knight Order.

“Ye, yes!”

Unlike the princess who was smiling as if she was very pleased, Lady Iris was stiff like she’d been affected by a witch’s petrification spell that you only heard of in folk tales.

-Yes, Iris. My most trusted Iris. And my trusted Iris went and cut my foot?”

“Hiiik!”

The princess was smiling even more brightly, but that laugh was, yes, the savagery of that smile made me think that was the sort of smile that the king of hell, King Yumra(1) would make when he sentenced sinners to hell.

-Our Iris got the person named Rein that she wanted, but I didn’t get my Ast that I waited ten years for? Well, it doesn’t matter. I’ve failed before when I tried to catch Ast previously.

The princess smiled even more brightly as she looked at the quivering noble lady like a lion staring down a rabbit. But unlike that smile the chill that spread throughout my body only increased.

-So, if it’s the Iris I know, I thought you would die together with that kid Rein for a peaceful death. Surely that’s just my imagination, right?

Shake shake shake shake.

That moment my leash started shaking like it had a vibrating function added to it. Of course, that was the lady’s shakes that were being transmitted through the leash in her hand!

“N, n... No...”

-Indeed. That’s right. Surely. To think you’d die comfortably after losing him. There’s.

No. Way. I. Would. Allow. That. Right?"

Shakeshakeshakeshakeshakeshakeshakeshake.

My body started to shake along with my collar.

Ah, of course it's also because the noble lady's shivers had reached fever pitch, but I started to shake myself! Seriously what, it feels like she'd revive us with black magic even if we killed ourselves!

-You guys are mine. It is also my right to allow you to die. You do not have that choice.

"Yeyeyeyeyeyes ma'am!"

-Very good. Now since we need to start the meeting. Bring that boy Rein and get over here.

"Un, understood!"

The place where the noble lady hurriedly dragged me by the leash was a place where hundreds, no, thousands of people were waiting. Since all of their gazes are focused on me it feels uncomfortable as hell.

I'm not going to get publicly executed, right?

"Th, that's?!"

"It can't be!"

And on the way to the lady's seat, everyone's eyes turned to me. More accurately, the thing on my belt...

"That bat... Did you get it from Ast, no Naruan!"

Yes, to the bat.

Hm. But it seems like that bat is quite famous. To think even the empire's army would know of it.

"Indeed I did?"

The moment I said that scores of people in my vicinity immediately took a knee, bowed their heads and shouted.

“Greetings to the successor of the bat!”

And

-Greetings to the successor of the bat!

Aside from the lady and a few others, everyone on the wide plain, thousands of people immediately took a knee and shouted.

“...Rein? What’s a bat?”

To the lady who had a face that couldn’t believe what she was seeing, I couldn’t reply either.

I thought I knew it well but I now I don’t know... Instructor, just what the hell did you do with the bat in the empire?

#10 Their story: a certain academy’s story.

“Is this person really coming into our academy?”

“But the conditions are just as shocking.”

At one point, it used to compete for the number 1, 2 position among the empire’s Four Great Academies, but currently it was the lowest, no there were even calls to remove Yugrasia from the four academies altogether and call it the Three Great Academies instead, that was how low the summoner’s school Yugrasia had fallen.

And the old man that was that Yugrasia’s current principal looked over a sheet of paper and nodded.

“We’ll take him in.”

“Understood.”

But the dilemma didn’t last long.

That was how bad Yugrasia's current situation was, and this person's fame was significant enough to be able to chart a path through these troubled times.

"The legendary summoner, Nicerwin. We will put our trust in him."

And thus was the beginning of a new age in Yugrasia's history.

(1) King of Hell in Buddhist and other assorted East Asian mythologies. Judges the sinners and sentences them to eternal torture. Also called King Yama/Enma in Japanese. Unrelated, but most famous fictitious 'example' in the Far East would probably be a certain Shikieiki Yamaxanadu of Touhou fame.

Side Story 1

A Certain Princess's Memories (1)

To me, the world.
Everything was grey.
It was not a metaphor.
Just that everything aside from me
Seemed to be in black and white.
Black and white.
And their mixture,
A grey-coloured world.
Then one day.

When I'd thought that all this was normal.

In my grey-coloured world.

In came another existence clad in colours other than grey.

#1 Their story: a certain villain's story

"This is the 17th Garden that the 9th Prince visits frequently, and thanks to that we can often see the 9th Prince. The 9th Prince's mother..."

As I listened to the explanation I could only think one thing. 'Just how big is this bloody imperial palace?'

According to the explanation the garden I saw just now was the seventeenth.

For the record, there are 51 gardens in the imperial palace.

We haven't even gone through half of them, yet half the day's already gone by!

As for why I'm looking at the gardens of the imperial palace, of course it's because I'm

here on an assignment for the organization.

Normally I should be working hard as an instructor and rolling the kids and sucking on the sweet honey, but my first cohort of disciples had nothing but monsters. Damn it.

Because of that for the first time in the organization's history they passed the tertiary training in just over a year.

Since most other instructors take just over 4 years to raise their cohorts I have three years left compared to them.

And our organization which is always has a labour shortage will never tell me 'good job' and let me play for three years!

Even so, to think they'd throw me into the field straight away, and into the infamous house of hell that's the imperial palace!

If you were to talk about the imperial palace, legend has it that it's the place where more organization members were killed because they had the wrong backer, instead of actually being outed as a spy!

Plus it's the infamous worst possible working environment in the organization, that no matter how well you did your job, if you were just shit out of luck then you were dead just like that!

No, but why is the organization sending a high-spec agent like me to this place!

"Because of this the nobles that are close to the 9th Prince often visit this place. These nobles are..."

Well, the silver lining is, that at least I had pretty good luck in seniors?

I'd heard that there were a lot of people that just half-assed the explanation and said get out if you can't take it, but my senior is explaining in great detail about the nobles that come often, as well as those nobles' factions and how influential they were.

Moreover, he was also telling me about which nobles to watch out for.

Although thanks to that, like I said earlier we still haven't gotten round to even half the palace grounds...

Of course I'm not doing a palace garden tour as a servant.

To be accurate it's a palace tour.

But if we haven't even seen half the gardens, just how much more places are there to cover?

I still need to see the knight orders, the places where the magicians are staying, the mages, magicians' workrooms that are classified secrets... this damn empire is so big I think it'll take at least a week to get round all of it.

Although thankfully it seems there are quite a few places that need to be kept secret?

Of course not all of them are classified areas, there could be a few fakes scattered around, but if I don't need to go there then that's good for me.

On the battlefield even if I'd been awake for three days and nights I still hadn't hurt, but maybe it was because I was wearing tight shoes, or whether I'd just been listening to boring stories all this time, but my feet were hurting more than they had on the battlefield.

It hurt and it hurt like hell!

"And... Ah, greetings, Your Highness."

"Greetings, Your Highness."

After explaining everything about the 17th Garden and while we were moving to where the 7th Knight Order were located, I saw a cute little girl with silver hair and red eyes.

For the record, the presence of imperial blood here showed itself as silver hair and red eyes.

They say that they carried the bloodline of Silver Dragons, but it's unsure whether it's true or not.

There's just too many stories of royal bloodlines with dragon blood in them after all.

But even if she's just a kid, she's royalty! A being that could easily order my head lopped off anytime!

Because of that I quickly bowed my head, but even as time passed, even as I felt that now should be about the time for permission to raise our heads to come along, the princess was still silent.

"Y, Your Highness?"

Her female bodyguard beside her called for her as if she was shocked, but there's still no order to raise our heads!

Damn it! Was this senior one on the princess's bad side?!

"Hirett... Was it?"

"It's an honour that you remember me."

"No, I just don't forget things I heard. But who's that behind you?"

"He's a new hire that just came in."

"New hire... alright, where's his dispatch?"

"That's still yet to be confirmed."

"Really?"

The conversation felt weird.

If I was under that senior's wing, right now there'd be all sorts of suffering and prosecution!

This is truly a fearful place, imperial palace! From the very beginning I chose the wrong line!

So the princess went past, the day ended with me being unable to see even 1/5 of the palace, and the next day.

"Congratulations. I've never seen something this drastic in ten years of working in the imperial palace."

"Eh?"

I tilt my head. That's odd. That's odd?

Wasn't I here as with a recommendation from some random baron with ties to the organization to be hired as common servant? Or am I dreaming right now?

"Haha, it seems you're surprised at working directly under the princess as well. But good luck."

But the feeling of my senior's hand patting my shoulder reminded me that this was reality.

It wasn't my senior but me? I haven't been discovered, have I?!



"Your Highness? Personal butler all of a sudden? Do you know him?"

"No? There's no way that I would know a commoner that came in only yesterday when I don't even go out of the palace?"

"But why..."

"Secret."

My Reia had been my bodyguard from a young age, but she still has a tendency of being surprised.

Of course, in terms of her bodyguarding skills I have no complaints. Her skills being a matter of course, her bodyguard abilities rank in the top tier among those her age, no, the entire knight order.

But, her downside is that she seems to lack a tiny bit of something for day to day living.

"Reia, if you keep doing that then you won't be able to get married?"

"Wha, what! You know how many marriage talks are coming to me! They're all..."

"Don't lie. They're marriage talks going to your family, considering you always get rejected when you meet face to face, just where do you think you're pretending to be unable to get married because of me?"

"Kurgh..."

Although Reia is sniffing, I need her to face reality.

It's all for Reia's sake. There are two big reasons why Reia always gets rejected.

One is that she's not feminine.

Well, although there are men that don't seem to care about that, but the next reason is probably why she keeps getting rejected.

"It's too much, Your Highness! Everything was for your sake!"

"Ahh... that's the problem."

She started to complain to me with freely dripping waterworks from her eyes.

Reia's mental strength is too weak. She can't control her emotions, so she prioritizes her emotions over the situation.

If it wasn't Reia but some other maid or guard then I'd have thrown her out already, her emotional control is that bad.

Because a person that rages when angry, cries when sad, laughs when happy, does not fit at all with this imperial palace where you must always hide your emotions.

But she's a famous prodigy even in her family which is renowned for its swordsmanship, didn't they say swordsmen were supposed to keep calm?

They say a sword that has lost its calm can't demonstrate its full strength, but even like this Reia's still strong.

Really, isn't the most important quality of a swordsman just strength?

Knock knock.

"Your Highness, mister Ast is here."

"Tell him to come in."

The grey-coloured door opened, and a man clad in myriad colours entered.

He seemed to be in his late 20s, perhaps early 30s, but since there were said to be many cases where commoners lived harsh lives and looked older than they were, is he more likely to be in his twenties.

"You, what are you?"

"Excuse me?"

"What are you."

What are you, that only you have colour? Are you the same as me? But in that case you shouldn't be alive.

Just, what on earth are you?

"Your Highness! I was so happy my workload would reduce because you brought in a person for the first time in a long time, but you're like this to him he'll quit straight away!"

"No, he can't quit. It's an imperial order."

"Eh?"

"Until I say so, he cannot resign."

Since the day my fate was decided, he was the first man bearing colour.

I haven't found out how or the reason, so I can't let him quit.

Before I know the reason why, I need to put him by my side and observe him.

"If you understood, then answer me. What are you?"

"I... am named Ast."

"I know your name."

"Then could you please tell me what it is you are asking me?"

"Are you an idiot? I asked what are you."

"So I said my name is Ast."

"I wasn't asking for your name."

"Then what else should I represent myself by? If I cannot represent myself by my name or person, then just what should I introduce myself as to Your Highness?"

He was tilted his head as if he didn't know, but his lips held a queer smile.

It was an expression that said I know what you want, but I'm not going to tell you so easily.

So, that's how you're going to play? Then I should respond in kind.

If it was my other siblings I would threaten them with my title, but that's not my style.

"What difficult things are you talking about? I just asked you what you were. But you're replying with such complicated words, do you even know what your role is?"

Now, these are a pure and innocent child's eyes.

Of course I am a child, but on the inside I'm nothing less than an adult.

Yes, ordinary people would probably call me a genius. But even so, I'm nine years old. It wouldn't be weird if I were to say such things.

"You are also responsible for my education. So, I'm asking you. Because I don't know. What are you? Explain in a way that's easy for me to understand."

"Your Highness, are you really doing that again. This is why all your servants quit."

As if she was getting a headache, Reia grumbled but Reia was never someone I had to be concerned with.

Now then, Ast. What will be your answer?

#2. Their story: A certain villain's story.

"You, what are you?"

"What are you."

Now, the first thing that this princess says when she meets me for the first time is this. Hm, what's. This. How should I respond?

"Your Highness! I was so happy my workload would reduce because you brought in a person for the first time in a long time, but you're like this to him he'll quit straight away!"

"No, he can't quit. It's an imperial order."

"Eh?"

"Until I say so, he cannot resign."

Plus, she even says she's using an imperial command preventing me from quitting.

Hoho, damn it. But at least I can ascertain something out of this. The princess definitely wants something from me. If I can understand what that is then I could probably direct this conversation to my favour...

"If you understood, then answer me. What are you?"

That kid's getting snippy, but since she's the princess I'm the one that should crawl.

"I... am named Ast."

I give her my name. Names are important. There's a reason why the question your name is. exists. Of course it's an alibi though. But even though I thought I answered rather well.

"I know your name."

"Are you an idiot? I asked what are you."

"I wasn't asking for your name."

The replies that come back are all arguments. No? wasn't? So what? Why is this not even ten-year old kid I'm seeing for the first time, wait, since I saw her yesterday it isn't our first meeting. But still, if you asked someone about a philosophical question the first time you met them, then how would you answer.

"Then what else should I represent myself by? If I cannot represent myself by my name or person, then just what should I introduce myself as to Your Highness?"

I don't know. To begin with I wasn't exactly good with philosophy, and it's not like I can yell 'I think! Therefore I am!' like Descartes. So I decided on a honest straight ball instead. But...

"What difficult things are you talking about? I just asked you what you were. But you're replying with such complicated words, do you even know what your role is?"

She tilted her head and asked like an innocent little kid. No, I actually don't understand what my job is?! I woke up and was dispatched as a personal butler, there's no way I'd know what I'm doing! It's not like there was a handover process either!

I just came because they ran over, said go this way. But the moment I arrive she asks who are you, and when I say I don't understand, what complicated things are you

saying. Hoho, not even an evil organization rushes work like this, would you say as expected of the empire, as expected of the imperial palace!

“You are also responsible for my education. So, I’m asking you. Because I don’t know. What are you? Explain in a way that’s easy for me to understand.”

Ah, so that was the case. I’m also in charge of the princess’s education. If that workload is included then it felt like there would be massive amounts of other workloads included in the package as well but this was the priority right now. Hm. Do I need to say something wise or something. No. since she doesn’t know then easily so she can understand. Easily...

Alright then let’s do it this way.

“I don’t know.”

Ah dunno! Sue me!

Side Story 2

A Certain Princess's Memories (2)

#3 Their story: a certain villain's story

"Ha?"

After a moment of silence, the princess's stupefied exclamation echoed through the room.

Although I didn't hear what my duties were, about this kid princess herself at least, my senior Hirett told me about her immediately after we met yesterday.

To summarize a thirty minute explanation, she's the First Imperial Princess of the empire and the greatest genius of the imperial family. And she's an asshole. Plus she apparently had the favour of the emperor so she did pretty much whatever she wanted.

Rather than half-assing something to an opponent like that, it's better to pretend I know nothing at all.

Alright then, let's show her my uselessness here, and get fired. Then the organization can't do anything about that either.

The princess that's loved oh so much by the emperor told me to piss off home, what else can I do?

Of course I could get a salary cut because of that, but considering the alternative is living in the imperial palace where ten lives aren't anywhere near enough to survive, it's better to just take a pay cut and go back to the organization as an instructor.

"My name is Ast. I was born in the old Harken Kingdom as a farmer's son, but I was forced to abandon my farm altogether due to war, when I came over to the empire and did odd jobs to survive, I found myself here. My age is 25, my hobby is reading. I have a special constitution that refused to allow me accumulate mana since the day I was

born, so no matter how much I practice my swordplay my skills are always lacking, and I cannot use magic either.”

“What, you could explain it.”

“But was that explanation what Your Highness wanted?”

“...No.”

And why should it. Although I don't know what she wants from me, I know her purpose.

She's just trying to screw me over. Considering what the knight named Reia said earlier, this was probably how she made many of her servants quit.

“Since Your Highness ordered me to explain simply, I shall explain simply. Your Highness. Does a person's essence lie in their physical body?”

“No.”

“Indeed, it does not. A person dies and leaves behind their body. But that is simply a corpse that soon rots away, it is not that person. In that case Sir Reia, what do you believe is the essence of a person.”

“Huh? M, me?”

The startled female knight stared at me with wide eyes. Very good. This is good prey.

“Yes.”

“Uh... Th, the soul?”

She struggled in that surprised state for a while before answering with a question.

She doesn't seem like an imperial knight which supposedly needs both strength and intelligence.

She appears to be the princess's bodyguard, so no doubt her martial skills will be very, very superior to make up for her intellectual shortfalls. Or maybe she's beside the princess because she's an idiot.

Ah, on the other hand, the princess could just be keeping her as a fun toy to play with.

“In that case, Sir Reia. If your soul was swapped with mine, and Sir Reia's soul and mind were in this body, would you still be Sir Reia?”

“Mmm... is it? No, isn't it? Mmm...”

“Don’t bully Reia. She’s not in charge of my education.”

“Your, Your Highness...”

The princess said to me as she looked at Sir Reia whimpering.

I think Sir Reia was actually quite moved by that.

“My head is far too good to be taught by an idiot.”

“Your Highness!”

Although I think that ended immediately.

“Your Highness. No matter whether that you think she may be an idiot, if a person by Your Highness’s side is deficient in knowledge that is not good.”

“It’s alright. There’s no one in the palace that doesn’t know that Reia’s an idiot. But her martial skills are excellent so it’s alright.”

“Wait, Your Highness! I’m not an...”

“No matter how splendid her martial arts may be, she should have the talent to identify what is good or bad for her mistress. If not then she would only be harmful to her owner.”

“It’s true, but it’s alright. I’m not so incompetent to be harmed simply because of Reia.”

“Isn’t Your Highness, and you both going way too far?! Especially you! It is the height of rudeness to say someone needs intelligence on their first meeting!”

I turned to Sir Reia who was shouting with a scarlet face.

Normally it wouldn’t be weird for her to draw her sword yelling “You dare show such disrespect? Pay the price with your head!” or such lines.

“Then Sir Reia. Could you please give me an answer to my previous question?”

“Urk! Th, that’s...”

“Reia, you don’t need to push yourself.”

“No, Your Highness! I can do this!”

Ohh! So she was the hot blooded loyal type after all!

After struggling hard for a bit Sir Reia said firmly as if she made up her mind.

“My answer, is no.”

“Why so?”

“No matter if my body and soul was in Sir Ast’s body, from other people’s perspective I would be Sir Ast, not myself.”

Well you could think that, you could think not.

Especially reincarnators, well, I’m included in this category as well, but after death, living in another body is quite a profound feeling.

If you were to classify this world into a genre, it would be fantasy in particular.

In a world where souls exist, I very curious as to what happened to the original soul of the body.

If I stole the original soul’s rightful place, then where did that soul go. Might it not inhabit some other medium and come back for revenge.

Of course these thoughts were only limited to when I was very young, when I had nothing to do.

Because normal commoners, in particular farmers had a hard enough time putting food on their plates, so they were busy farming.

Plus since when I was alive, the current trend of the fantasy genre was reincarnating in things other than humans, or reincarnating without any reincarnator bonuses, no, sometimes they were even debuffed as hell for a miserable life. In novels you had a spider or a slime, heck even a sword had a great time after they reincarnated!

At the very least it would’ve been great if I had a masked devil that would make my past life’s items from my explanations and sell them to let me pocket a royalty.(1)

Because in my past life and present, I had it hard because I was lacking talent.

“In that case, who is that person?”

“Eh?”

“Sir Reia’s memories and soul came into my body but that is not Sir Reia. Then is it me?”

“Uh, th... that’s not it either.”

“Then if I were to enter Sir Reia’s body then would that mean that that was not me

either? In that case where did I go, and who is the one that came into my body?”
“Huh? Hm? That?”

Sir Reia who returned to her whimpering state was kind of cute.

To the point where you really wanted to bully her.

Really, teasing idiots has a satisfyingly fun feeling.

Since she's the princess's personal bodyguard she'd be of a relatively famous noble family's daughter but she's not arrogant, and she's pure.

That's the perfect type to bully. But since this place isn't my actual workplace, more accurately quitting is in my best interests so I need to unfortunately give up on that.

“In one way, Sir Reia's answer is correct. But in another, it is not. Everything is interpretable in many ways. Things are not divided into good and bad things from their existence. Good. Bad. Helpful. Hindrance. Splendid. Horrifying. Everything is up to one's own interpretation. Your Highness will no doubt have already interpreted myself however you saw fit. And Your Highness will reinterpret what I have said just now with your own standards and viewpoints.

“In other words, don't ask?”

Those eyes that pretended to be pure turned indifferent again.

Really, her bright eyes earlier really didn't suit the princess. How would you put it, like a shonen manga was drawn with a shoujo artstyle?

It had an awkwardness like a hot blooded battle action manga where all of a sudden it wouldn't have felt odd that the protag and the male rival would suddenly fall into a dangerous swamp beginning with B.

And it also seems like she's slightly annoyed. Good.

Now just like this, I need to keep annoying her that I keep my head while getting fired!

“That was not my intention. I simply know myself. But, the me that Your Highness was questioning me about is something Your Highness would know, not me. And so, I wish for Your Highness to watch me, and evaluate me accordingly.

According to the formal manners I learned I bowed my head.

Now, what will be your next move! Unless it's the gallows' morning dew ending(2) I have the courage to accept it all! Even better if you fire me!

Tap. Tap.

The princess's short fingers started drumming the table.

When I snuck a glance upwards, both the princess and Sir Reia had their eyes closed and seemed to be thinking of something.

But Sir Reia? Should the princess's bodyguard have her eyes closed like that? Can the bodyguard of royalty commit such gross negligence of duties like that?

"Alright. This question, I'll accept it as you having answered it."

Just as I began to seriously think that Howling could probably take the imperial palace, the princess said with an expression that seemed like she was pleased with something.

Uhh, it's not good if you're happy...

It'd be so much greater if you said I don't need an incompetent commoner like you so get lost! And fire me?

"Aha! I finally found it! Everything can be solved if the truth that mister Ast and my bodies were swapped is revealed!"

"...ah, and since my education is unnecessary, educate that idiot."

"Haa... you gave me a task that is too difficult."

"Aren't both of you being way too unreasonable to me?"

Seeing Sir Reia squawk in protest I swore to myself.

Alright then, I probably wasn't going to get fired straight away anyway. In that case I'll bully Sir Reia and make Her Highness get sick of me, and get fired!

And one year later, I still couldn't get myself fired.



He was very quick-witted, his memory is excellent in pointless things, and is very skilled in sophistry.

That would be a simplified version of my assessment of him.

Firstly, his wits are very, very good.

Too good. So good that it annoys me.

And so until I find what it is I want from him I will never let him quit, just when I started to start being more flagrant while maintaining a line.

“Your Highness. Eating carrots is good for your eyesight. It is also good for your joints, good for your teeth, and since it has heating properties it is also very effective for people with cool bodies.”

“...If my eyesight deteriorates I can always wear glasses, and there are no problems with my joints. My teeth are sturdy too.”

“Even so you need to eat. The imperial chefs worked hard to make these.”

“Hey, Ast? I definitely remember telling that chef to not put carrots in. Was the chef changed while I wasn’t aware?”

“No. There’s no way that there would be that many competent chefs, would there? Of course it is because I requested him to add carrots. Picky eating is not good for you. Ah, for the record Sir Reia, carrots are also good for constipation and balding.”

“Why is it that in the middle of talking to Her Highness, that you suddenly tell me those things mister Ast!”

I’m going to live a short and bright life anyway, it’s alright for me to be a picky eater, no?

Although my mouth is twitching I cannot speak. Those that know the story number no more than five including Reia.

No matter how unusual he is, I cannot tell him that!

“I’m not eating!”

“You’re not a child.”

“I am a child?”

“If you’re a child then you need to even more nutrients for your growth. Nutritional deficiencies cause imbalances in the body’s growth. Isn’t that right, Sir Reia?”

“Why, why are you scanning my body up and down like that? Are you picking a fight? Even if you are Her Highness’s personal butler insulting nobility is a crime!”

“See, Your Highness. If you don’t eat carrots then you may also end up lacking confidence in your body like Sir Reia.”

“Kuaaaaak! I’m going to kill you, I’m gonna kill you!”

Ast’s eyes flickered over to Reia’s nearly twenty-year old breasts.

They’re flat. I know perfectly well that a woman’s breast size can bring male affection.

But I don’t particularly have any wishes of being looked at by men, and even if I did, I am 100% dead before that time even comes.

But, why is my hand so naturally reaching for the carrots?

“Your Highness?! Those carrots that you hate, where on me did you look that you made up your mind to eat them! If that place was my breasts then I feel like I’ll have to question my loyalty to Your Highness!”

“Reia, picky eating is not good for you.”

“I am not a picky eater! Before that I actually like carrots!”

“Ha, Ast. I found a big error in your logic. I don’t think I’ll need carrots.”

“I understand.”

“Are the two of you really going to do this to me?!”

Reia who’s yelling with her face all red is cute.

Although she’s older than me, cute things are cute.

To Reia who’s grumbling “I’m still growing!” or “I, I still have hope...” in tears, I should show Reia’s mother, elder sister and her relatives as examples to show her the truth that she has no hope.

“Huuuk... Her Highness has changed... it’s all mister Ast’s fault!”

The result, she ran out of the room in tears.

Ahh, so cute, Reia.

"You made her cry."

"You already half-brought her there."

"The one who finished her off was Your Highness."

"Of course. Making Reia cry is one of my few joys in life."

My hand naturally moved to the tea on the table.

Although I wondered why people drank such bitter water to begin with, I fell for Ast's taunts and so I eventually came to the habit of drinking it.

Now it's come to the point where I can enjoy the taste and fragrance of it.

"It tastes good."

"It was harvested this morning. Since it was grown in the palace gardens it tastes even better."

"...That's odd. As far as I know this herb isn't one that I know is cultivated in the palace."

"Ah, when requested it with Your Highness's name, they made it for me. As expected of Your Highness. I didn't think that they could build a herb garden in just three days."

"What?"

What the hell is this brat spouting now. Although it's only every once in a while, this man does some truly ridiculous things without even blinking.

"Hey. Ast. This tea is your favourite, isn't it?"

"Ah, it is. It's also a tea that Your Highness drinks quite frequently."

"And what is the reason that I drink this tea so often?"

"Of course isn't it because I brew it for you so often?"

"Alright, in the first place I didn't drink tea at all! And suddenly the palace has its own herb garden? And one that produces your favourite variety, Ast? Do you think this is coincidence?"

"I do not believe it is coincidence."

"That means that you're acknowledging that you used my name to order the creation of a herb garden for your own purposes?"

"No. Your Highness. I just simply told the palace maids that you enjoyed this tea."

Is he mad?

Even if Ast is my personal butler, he's someone who's been here for barely a year, you

could still get to him more quickly by counting from the bottom.(3)

And this fellow used my name to make a tea plantation for himself.

Of course there would be no evidence.

Because all he did was simply telling the maids.

But telling the palace maids is nothing less than spreading the rumour through the entire palace.

Moreover there's no way that this man wouldn't realise the presence of the maid network which is especially easy to spread and twist rumours through. Even among the insane there is probably no bastard more insane than him.

"Is there a problem?"

"No."

Well, it's not like I have either proof or justification.

Well, it's also true that I do enjoy this tea now.

And more than anything else, I like this type of crazy bastard very very much.

(1) In order: Kumoko of Kumo desu ka, nani ka? (I'm a Spider, So What?) Rimuru of Tensei Shitara Slime Datta Ken (That Time I Got Reincarnated as a Slime) Master/Shishou/Swordbro of Tensei Shitara Ken Deshita (I was a Sword When I Reincarnated), Vanir of Konosuba.

(2) Saying in Korea to describe the futility/fragility of life. Supposedly the Greek philosopher Plato described the unjust death of his mentor Socrates as 'vanished into the morning dew of the execution grounds', although I am not sure since a solid 15 minutes of searching for both Plato and Socrates yielded no English results.

(3) As in, if you took all the palace's hires and lined them up by experience with the most on top and least on the bottom, you'd get to him quicker from the bottom because he still has one of the least number of years of experience

Side Story 3

A Certain Princess's Memories (3)

#4 Their story: A certain villain's story

"Is there a problem?"

"There isn't."

Why? Why was there no problems?

I'd done something that might have been a bit dangerous but then she went and said oh-so-casually that there weren't any problems.

Seriously, for personal profit I fooled the palace office workers and sold out the name of a member of the imperial family to make a herb field?

Starting from the finance department, I chose locations, made a farm to raise herbs in, and even had personnel assigned to look after it, and all that was actually done just so I could drink my favourite tea!

And there's no problems!

If this was a democracy it wouldn't be weird for me to get impeached!

"Either way, Reia's back yet. Go and soothe her a bit."

"Your Highness, people are beings that cry more when someone tries to get them to stop. Sir Reia's a simple person so if we wait she'll calm down on her own and come back."

So I say, but if I'm seen next to a crying Sir Reia and misunderstood, that's a big problem.

Seriously, I thought she was just some barony or earl's daughter, or a countess or baroness as the princess's personal bodyguard.

But oh my god! It turns out she's a daughter of one of the famous Ten Great Families of the empire, a daughter of the Areista Marquisate!

And the most famous up and coming prospect of that family at that!

She was one who held overwhelming authority within her family that even the next marquis had to show deference to her!

And if word got out I made her cry?

The Areista family could just off me without anyone the wiser.

No, before that I could get stabbed by the female knights that all respect Sir Reia.

So let's leave the teasing Sir Reia to within the princess's rooms. Of course I'm not going to stop.

That's my only joy in this palace life and I can't give that up, too!

After a moment of silence, whether she didn't like that moment of quiet the princess said with a dry voice.

"I'm bored."

She could be.

"Since Your Highness is free most of the time it can't be helped."

Other members of the imperial family have personal tutors, and experience assorted duties, but our princess is doing nothing.

"If you know then do something fun."

"How do you wish for me to do something fun?"

At my question the princess thought for a bit before she said with a smile.

"Strategy and tactics, are you good with those?"

Well, a bit of Sta**raft back in the day... (1)

#5 Their story: a certain bodyguard's story.

"Sniff. But I'm still Her Highness's bodyguard."

"Yes. Sir Reia is a splendid knight!"

"You can do it!"

"We believe in you, Sir Reia! If we don't believe in you, who else can we believe in!"

As I rubbed my reddened eyes, I came out from the nearby maids' room and headed to Her Highness's room.

Her Highness was being much too mean lately.

Since mister Ast came along, Her Highness's teasing has only gotten worse.

She keeps making fun of me as if to say she wouldn't lost to Ast, but I would really, really like it if they wouldn't play games with me.

"And..."

If nothing else, I still have the chance for growth!

The maids said.

The size of a girl's breasts do have to do with genes, but they can also be grown with effort.

And among the 208 secret techniques of the imperial palace there were also techniques to make your breasts bigger.

"Three massages a day, drink milk with blended strawberries."

I looked at what I'd written and nodded with resolve.

Yes, it's not over yet. I'm still nineteen! My growth period might not have ended!

"...Right?"

But tears spring to my eyes again.

Although my father's a unique exception in our family as one of the advisors in the palace, but whether it was a specialty in our predominantly combat-orientated family, most of the women in my house had small breasts.

I think my youngest sister has the beginnings of sprouts, but they're about as big as mine...

"It's over..."

The fire of hope died once again.

When I think that I'm the same size as my twelve year-old sister, I think I'm done for.

If I head back to Her Highness's room I think either she or Ast would tease me how my breasts are as big as a twelve year-old's.

Yep. I don't wanna go back. Should I run away...

"Sob... no, I need to go."

But I still need to protect Her Highness. Compared to her my br... my breasts aren't much... of a problem.

Yep. Compared to Her Highness's fate my breasts wouldn't even be worth comparing to.

"Your Highness, sorry I'm late... huh?"

"No, it's impossible! Never! Even if you're being pushed back isn't your argument seriously impossible?"

"I believe that Your Highness is the one that should be admitting that your commanding forces are destroyed."

But inside the room that I'd steeled myself to enter were Her Highness and mister Ast engaged in a fiery debate.

Considering the assorted types of pieces on the table, I think they were holding a mock

war game.

It seemed that it was because they were at odds over a particular opinion.

And... I have a bad feeling about this. Really!

“Reia!”

“Sir Reia!”

In the middle of their argument the two of them turned to me and shouted.

Yep. As I thought. I’d had a bad feeling about this. They were probably going to ask me, weren’t they?

“Do you think this is possible? This rascal, no matter how much he hates losing he’s arguing something impossible.”

“I am simply arguing that what can be done can be done. Sir Reia, I understand Her Highness’s desire for victory, but she also needs to know when to acknowledge defeat.”

Seeing Her Highness and mister Ast run towards me I tried to run away but even before I could open the already-closed door, all I could do was turn my back flat against the door, unable to retreat any further.

“Reia!”

“Sir Reia!”

Hiiiik! Scary! Her Highness is scary, mister Ast is scary too!

Logically I would listen to both sides and choose one, but in that case the other would tear into me.

Her Highness is scary like Her Highness, and mister Ast is picky like Ast is.

Uwaah. I don’t wanna...

I just got myself sorted! I’m about to cry again!

But mister Ast always said that even if the sky were to fall, there was always a hole to escape through.

And now is the time to find that hole in the sky!

“Ca, can’t you just prove it?”

“Prove?”

“Yes! Try it out in real life and if it doesn’t work then mister Ast is the loser, and if it does it would be mister Ast’s victory, wouldn’t it?”

At the perfect answer that would bring even a famous judge to tears Her Highness and Ast drew back from me.

I clutched my shocked chest and sighed...

‘Hic, they’re small...’

As I calmed my shocked chest another wound opened up and I had to calm myself again.

But I didn’t know then. That this one line, would mark a turning point in history.

#6 Their story: a certain empire army(soldier)’s story (sky episode)

“It’s cold.”

“It is.”

“No matter how I see this I don’t think this is right...”

Even as I shivered in the clouds 4000 metres above sea level I continued to cast magic.

But it’s cold.

Even if I do wear warm clothes when I’m out flying, if I was called up suddenly for something like this then of course I’d be underprepared. And it just had to be ice magic at that.

Damn it, I’m freezing here, and I have to make ice!

“Ast, was he? Damn him. For an asshole that sits warm and dry in an office he makes people pointlessly suffer. I will remember this.”

“Don’t be like that. He’s ‘that imperial princess’s’ personal retinue, you know? Look at Sir Reia. She’s always suffering there.”

“No, from what I heard from a reliable source, I heard he tears into Sir Reia with Her Highness as well? And apparently he’s pretty skilled at it too.”

“Ha? You sure of your source? Someone in their right mind would bully Areista’s Sword Princess? Is that even possible unless you’re a lunatic? Is it?”

“Yeah, to think an ordinary commoner would tease a swordmaster. That’s actually scary itself.”

“Hey, it’s dropping. Don’t let it fall!”

Although we were all talking like this was part of our daily routine, this task was something that demanded oddly specific requirements.

Firstly, we needed to suppress our magic output to the point that the soldiers that Her Highness led couldn’t detect us, and we weren’t casting ice magic like we normally did, but drew in the water vapour in the air and froze it just like that.

It took longer to do this than you’d think, and since we’re producing normal ice it doesn’t even float in the air like normal magic, so we needed to keep a normal chunk of ice floating in mid-air and hence the mana drain was intense.

To the extent that because of this, we had three experienced mages on a team for this job.

“What was next?”

“Let’s see. Cast protection magic and a magic barrier, acceleration magic, gravity magic, as much of these as possible?”

“It might have been harder if it was ice magic, but since it’s a chunk of ice this shouldn’t be too bad. It might be fun to draw a magic formation after using all those support spells?”

“But was there anyone who said that this was possible?”

“There wasn’t. it’s been nearly a thousand years since battlemages were first used, you guys all know just how much development’s gone into anti-magic bombardment spells since then, right? Unless that enemy is either a retard or under conditions of a perfect ambush the likelihood of success isn’t very high.”

I answered my subordinate’s question who was still diligently casting magic.

Now that I think about it, isn’t this, actually quite a serious problem?

Although I thought it made absolutely no sense at first, but once we actually tried it the preparation steps were successful.

And if this actually worked, then the use of mages would change forever...

“Right, let’s drop it.”

“Yes, sir.”

Once all the magics have been cast, the completed lump of ice was dropped.

The method was simple. We just had to undo the levitation magic we’d been maintaining and it would just fall on its own.

The gravity magic and acceleration magic let it hit the ground instantly.

“So then. What happens if this works?”

As I watched the block of ice fall to the ground at a high speed, my subordinate asked me.

If this works? Well then.

“All hell breaks loose.”

#7 Their story: a certain empire army(soldier)’s story (ground episode)

“Why am I the target...”

“Well, it’s not like Her Highness can do it herself...”

Who would believe that the beauty who’s making a teary face beside me, is actually said to be the most likely swordswoman to succeed the current Sword Star, the Sword Princess famous throughout the empire.

If the many female knights that dreamed of her knew this truth, they’d all be running to kill that man named Ast.

Although of course they’d fail because of Her Highness.

“Even so, there’s zero possibility that this would work. It makes absolutely no sense. And in a state where we know a magic bombardment is coming it can never succeed.”

What is the flower of war?

It’s magic.

The power of a magician brigade’s large-formation spells that could overturn the results of a war thought to have been set in stone was known by every soldier out there.

And the methods to block this damage were diligently researched even in the age of peace where war was absent.

And because of that, the mages’ bombardments which used to be the number one danger on the battlefield, were faced with defensive tactics and skills where they only worked in an ambush, no, maybe not even an ambush any more.

“Now, see, Sir Reia. No matter how much you hide the presence of your mana, since magic spells need to be fired off with magic power anyway, the mana reactions will be detected no matter what.”

“Indeed.”

I showed the mana detector device that was blinking red to Sir Reia, who nodded as she looked at it with curiosity.

No matter if there was a specialist mage that interfered with our ability to detect magic use, the limits to that were very, very fixed.

Meaning that even if you couldn’t detect a mage’s mana output from a distance not visible to the naked eye, once they fired it off the magic would be detected as it came to our location, and so the moment we noticed it, we could set up a magic barrier at any time.

“Now, look. They’re probably going to fire off a spell while hidden in the clouds, but if we carefully raise a magic barrier then we can easily defend against it.”

My subordinates were already casting layers upon layers of magic barriers up to as high as their spellcasting could reach.

Now, look.

Using these magic barriers we will stop that magic bombardme...

Shatter!

Iznt wurking?

(1) Starcraft. One of modern Korea's traditional folk games. ← Only a slight exaggeration

Side Story 4

A Certain Princess's Memories (4)

#8 Their story: The sword princess's story

"Now, my soldiers, you will be divided into my and Ast's troops and we will be conducting a war game!"

The tiny princess shouted in a loud authoritative voice that didn't suit her small frame.

Her Highness's personal mage corps.

Only Her Highness has this much power as her bodyguard forces among all the members of the imperial family.

That's how important Her Highness is in the imperial palace.

But His Majesty didn't give her a battlemage brigade for this!

Although more accurately it's because of what I said!

I'm sorry, sir mages!

"Now then, Reia. Lead my army."

"...Huh?"

"I can't do it myself."

"But, but still..."

"It's alright. If it's Reia I can trust you with them."

"Your Highness..."

Her Highness was trusting me. Yes, Her Highness trusted me enough to lead her army in her stead...

"If Ast is right, this is a technique that will obliterate my base, if it's Reia you can survive, right?"

“...Yes.”

Ah, so it was that kind of faith.

I held back the tears that were about to leak out.

Yes, Her Highness trusted me. As a good shield.

But I still spent five years with her, but she only trusts me that little!

“Very good. If Sir Reia’s the target, then it won’t matter if I fire everything without holding back.”

“Wait, Your Highness? Mister Ast said a target just now? Does that mean I’m the target?”

“Hm? Of course. What we were discussing earlier was Ast using his hidden mage corps to annihilate the enemy base with a magic bombardment while taking out all the enemy leaders with it. So of course the leader Reia would be the target.”

“Understood, Your Highness. Then mister Ast? What exactly do you mean by firing without holding back?”

“Exactly what I said. If it’s Her Highness then I need to scale back the firepower, but if it’s Sir Reia you can defend against any attack no matter how powerful, no? You’re the famous ‘Sword Princess’ after all.”

“Uwaaaaaah!”

It’s embarrassing. What Sword Princess! Who the heck came up with that name?

After mister Ast heard that name he teased me for a week, to think he’d still make fun of me for it even after a year!

“A princess in front of the imperial princess, how cool Reia.”

“Y, Your Highness...”

“As expected of a nickname I came up with. It suits her, right Ast?”

“Indeed. I can only applaud Your Highness’s naming sense!”

“Her Highness was the culprit!”

Kukoom! My body quivered at the feeling of betrayal by the princess that I’d believed in.

The culprit was Her Highness!

Well of course because of that I became the subject of admiration by all the female knights!

Aside from how older unnis come up to me with this gaze that really gives me the shivers asking me “can I call you unni?”(1) I was still somewhat acknowledged by my family! But it’s still embarrassing! The culprit was Her Highness!

“Just what am I to Your Highness?”

“My sole pleasure in life?”

“You, you thought of me like...”

“So you see her as a toy.”

“Mister Ast! Don’t destroy my feelings! The relationship between Her Highness and I is something that mister Ast would never...”

“Yep, my toy and the sole pleasure in my life.”

“Just how low is Your Highness going to drop my loyalty!”

Uuwuuu, Her Highness has been extremely mean to me lately.

Before she would just indirectly tease me a lot but lately she’s just been doing it directly.

It’s too much.

Is it all because of mister Ast? Or was Her Highness always like that.

“Why am I the target...”

“Well, Her Highness can’t do it herself...”

As I grumbled along holding back my tears, a mister soldier beside me answered.

Ah, I know that.

It just feels kinda unfair... just something like that.

“Even so, there’s zero possibility that this would work. It makes absolutely no sense. And in a state where we know a magic bombardment is coming, it can never succeed.”

The person who said this with confidence, was a Sergeant of this mage brigade.

Considering he was a veteran of the war with the former Harken Kingdom, he should be trustworthy.

“Now, see, Sir Reia. No matter how much you hide the presence of your mana, since magic spells need to be fired off with magic power anyway, the mana reactions will be detected no matter what.”

“Indeed.”

I nodded as I saw the magic power detection device glowing red.

Wow. This is quite interesting. Even though I can't see anything with my eyes, there's a red light shining from it.

Her Highness was right!

Since Her Highness said she was going to scold mister Ast big-time for this, this is going to be a good show!

And I'll secretly ask Her Highness to give him a big punishment as revenge for everything till now!

“Now, look. They're probably going to fire off a spell while hidden in the clouds, but if we carefully raise a magic barrier then we can easily defend against it.”

Now to the point where we could see with our naked eyes, the mages began casting barrier spells to defend against the ice magic falling at high speeds.

That ice made with magic would never get through the barri...

Shatter!

“It can?”

Very easily, the first barrier was destroyed, and scores of barriers began to tear apart like paper afterwards.

Hm. What's. That.

“Um, mister mage? What are we going to do when it's falling like that?”

“...It’s an emergency! Bail!”

“Ehhht?!”

The mister mage whose face turned sheet white yelled to the mages nearby and as expected of a veteran mage, they quickly cast teleportation magic and escaped...

Wait a second!

“Wh, what about me?”

The target was definitely me.

Meaning that those things were all falling towards me, which meant...

“Hiiiiik?!”

Hey, mister Ast?

Even so, I’m the target, you’ve totally listened to your conscience and attacked lightly, right? It won’t matter even if I get hit, right?

And as I thought that, Ast in my imagination laughed and said.

‘If Sir Reia’s the target, then it won’t matter if I fire everything without holding back.’

“Ah, this is dangerous...”

At the danger to my life that was getting nearer by the second, I had no choice but to draw my sword.”



“...It’s an emergency! Bail!

The mages under my command escaped from the area with long-practiced skill.

The falling silver rain.

The crimson sword aura that cut through that.

What, was that meant to be?

The history of the Karuan Empire now stretched for a thousand years. And during those thousand years there were thousands of small skirmishes, and in those skirmishes heroes appeared, and vanished.

And more than the number of heroes, there were countless more soldiers whose names were never recorded in the history books.

Countless deaths.

The basic strategies that were formed as a result of those deaths. But those basic strategies are always changing.

They say that some of them developed an unblockable attack method that changed the history of warfare, while others developed ways to counter against attacks and changed the history of warfare.

And the defense strategies against the modern-day magic bombardments were refined to perfection.

They had been. Until now.

“It actually broke through?”

“I told you it would work.”

As he watched the silver rain fall, Ast made the smile of a victor.

Yes, it's my loss.

Although the last time I made a bet with someone else was far back enough I couldn't even remember it, but is this not my first loss in my life?

Well, still, if it's for this sort of technique, I think it'll be alright to lose.

“Sir Reia. She really is strong.”

Ast said as he looked on at Reia.

“Haa. Of course. She’s my only personal bodyguard.”

Although I’ve watched over Reia from a very young age myself, but Reia is someone who changes so dramatically when she holds a sword that even I have a hard time keeping up with her.

I didn’t give her the nickname Sword Princess for nothing, and there’s a reason that no one in the palace dares to refute a name as over-the-top as that.

“Reia’s the youngest swordsmaster in the history of the Empire.”

Officially, the empire’s youngest-ever swordsmaster, someone who shaved off the previous Sword Star’s record by two years, someone that could be called the future Sword Star.

Perhaps after I die, she might even go into the imperial knight order as a Captain of the knight order.

As I watched Reia slice through the last shot and glare at Ast with eyes filled with rage, I had an amusing thought.

“Ah, that reminds me. I lost this time. Sorry I didn’t believe you. So, I’ll give you a suitable reward.”

Since I lost I should give him a suitable reward in compensation.

In addition, the tactic that he showed me just now is a bombardment strategy that could change the face of modern warfare.

If I told His fight-loving Majesty this, he would undoubtedly be pleased. So pleased that he could go out and attack a neighbouring country right away.

In that case, I think he could get an even greater reward than whatever I could give him personally.

Me leading an army with the weirdly unique Ast, with Reia as the vanguard. That’s quite an amusing line up.

Although it might be hard for me to ever see it happen.

#9 Their story: a certain villain's story

"It actually broke through?"

"I told you it would work."

As I watched the magic barriers break apart like a couque d'asse(2) I smiled victoriously.

There are many different kinds of magic with many uses and power that if you thought of it in modern terms, they would range between smoke grenades to nuclear missiles.

And thanks to that the methods of magical defense was a long-standing area of research for the people in this world.

And because of that counters against magic bombardments made them all but irrelevant.

But why is magic called magic!

It's because they use magic power.

Because of this, most magic was compromised of mana, and if you created a magic barrier with more mana than the attack then the spell would naturally dissipate against it.

Namely, magic bombardments are basically meaningless against overwhelming force.

Of course unless an individual had like a dragon's worth of mana or something.

But what was falling now was not lumps of mana, but pure ice made by the condensation and freezing of water vapour in the clouds.

Of course magic was added to that. A higher velocity increases the destructive force of matter.

And the accelerated ice keeps getting faster and faster even as the support spells

casted on it faded away, the only way to stop that was either blowing it apart with magic, or simple physical brute force.

But if it's at that speed you'd need at least a thick wall of steel to block it, and the tents made of fabric and cloth in war would be very, very easily destroyed.

But...

"Sir Reia. She really is strong."

"Haa. Of course. She's my only personal bodyguard."

And she's blocking it all by herself.

Seriously, once you were abandoned by the mages beside you should have gapped it instantly. Why she was swinging her sword over there I would never understand, but if it's that skill then she really could just stand there and block it all like that.

"Reia's the youngest swordsmaster in the history of the Empire."

"It looks like her nickname of Sword Princess wasn't just for show."

Really, even when I called her Sword Princess(lol) I thought it was just a joke. Even more once I found out the person who came up with it was Her Highness.

But as she was right now, she more than deserved that name of Sword Princess.

Just how many swordsmen existed that could slice those scores and scores of ice chunks at least 4-5 metres wide, some as big as 10 metres, all falling on top of you at once, with just a sword?

And, just how many beings exist that have that extravagant crimson sword aura, as well as the mana needed to maintain that?

The crimson sword aura so naturally, elegantly, swelled up to slice the blocks of ice many times her own height, and that appearance even looked very beautiful, living up to her nickname as the Sword Princess.

"Reia is already, probably the Areista family's strongest swordsman."

When Reia cut through the last block of ice, and glared at me resentfully and ran

towards me, for a second I felt a cold sweat break out down my back.

Mm. scary. Even that simpleton's a monster. As expected of the imperial palace!

I need to run away as soon as possible! My life is in danger!

"Ah, that reminds me. I lost this time. Sorry I didn't believe you. So, I'll give you a suitable reward."

But, Her Imperial Highness that laughed like that, had a letter from the knight order sent to me three days later.

-As His Majesty was also deeply moved by this official's(3) stratagems, the First Imperial Princess Atia nel Karuan's personal butler Ast will be bestowed an honorary knighthood as well as the surname Lilac.

Ho ho, to my departed parents.

I've finally become a noble! Hurrah! I'm a noble! Hurrah!

Iyaaah, I'm so happy! Even His eminent Imperial Majesty was deeply moved! God damn it all! Now it's even harder for me to get fired!

-The organization is very pleased with your current operative successes.

Hoho, now even the organization's happy as well? Just when can I go back to the organization? Can I even go back?!

(1) Term used for younger females to address older females, including what little sisters call big sisters. You can more or less think of it as JP's Onee-sama, occasionally with yuribait included like the JP version.

(2) A weird example of Belgian French getting bastardized into Korean by Korean marketers. Read as 'cucudas' (쿠크다스, [image here](#)) in Korean, it's a biscuit that's extremely thin, fragile, and borderline-impossible to open the packaging without breaking it. To say someone has a 'cucudas' mentality means they break very, very easily, and in Korea that's the 'final boss' of fragility, as in **weaker than 'tofu mentality'**.

(3) 'This official' in the raws was 貴官 or 貴官. Anyone have any idea how to go about translating this properly?



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